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**Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies**

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*Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), the most distinguished pioneer of feminist historiography in Japan, identified Japan's antiquity as a matricultural society with the use of the phrase 'women-centered culture'* (josei chūshin no bunka). *The ancient classics of Japan informed her about the maternalistic values embodied in matrilocal residence patterns, and in women's beauty, intelligence, and radiance. Her scholarship provided the first strictly empirical verification of the famous line from Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971), "In the beginning, woman was the sun." Takamure recognized matricentric structures as the socioeconomic conditions necessary for women to express their inner genius, participate fully in public life, and live like goddesses. This paper explores Takamure's reconstruction of the marriage rules of ancient Japanese society and her pursuit of the underlying principles of matriculture. Like Hiratsuka, Takamure was a maternalist feminist who advocated the centrality of women's identity as mothers in feminist struggles and upheld maternal empowerment as the ultimate basis of women's empowerment. This epochal insight into the 'woman question' merits serious analytic attention because the principle of formal equality still visibly disadvantages women with children.*

**Keywords**
Japanese women, Ancient Japan, matriculture, Takamure Itsue, Hiratsuka Raicho

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*Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), pionière éminente de l'historiographie feministe au Japon, a découvert dans l'antiquité japonaise une société matricuturelle qu'elle a identifiée comme: une 'société centrée sur les femmes'* (josei chūshin no bunka*) ou société gynocentrique. Elle a découvert dans les oeuvres classiques japonaises des valeurs maternalistes incarnées dans les formes de résidence matrilocale, ainsi que dans ce qu'elle perçu comme la beauté, l'intelligence et le rayonnement des femmes. L'oeuvre de Takamure a ainsi fourni la première vérification empirique des célèbres paroles de Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971): "Au commencement, la femme était le soleil'. Pour Takamure, les structures matricentriques fournissent les conditions socio-économiques essentielles permettant aux femmes d'exprimer leur génie intérieur, de participer pleinement à la vie publique, et de vivre comme des déesses. Cet article explore la reconstruction par Takamure des règles de mariage de l'ancienne société japonaise et sa recherche des principes matriculturels sous-jacents. Comme Hiratsuka, Takamure était une féministe maternaliste qui prônait, dans les luttes féministes, la centralité de l'identité des femmes en tant que mères. Pour Takamure, l'émancipation maternelle est la base ultime de l'émancipation des femmes. Sa lucidité révolutionaire sur 'la question de la femme' mérite une analyse sérieuse car les inégalités de genre touchent encore visiblement les femmes avec des enfants.*

**Mots-clés**
Femme japonaise, Japon ancien, matriculture, Takamure Itsue. Hiratsuka Raicho

**3. Indigenous Beliefs for Sustainability: On the Significance of Ritual in the Gender Ecology of Tibetan and Mosuo Matricultures of Northwestern Yunnan – Tommaso Previato 34**

*The present study explores the intersection of Indigenous beliefs and (eco)sustainability from a gender perspective. Overviewing China's development agenda and strategic environmental assessments in minority areas, it probes into the ritual economy of two matricultural systems in the southwestern province of Yunnan: Deqin (Diqing) and Yongning (Ninglang). In these places, women's engagement in community matters, responsible management of resources, and the ritual exchange between humans and the cognized world of territorial gods and elemental spirits of nature entwine with one another. Special attention is given to the knowledge of mountain forest ecosystems retained by Khamba Tibetan, Mosuo and Naxi people, as well as to the extent to which kin-based arrangements, matricultural concerns, religious norms and taboos motivate economic choices.*

**Keywords**
Indigenous beliefs, sustainability, gender ecology, Chinese minorities, ritual economy

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*Dans cette étude, l'auteur explore l'intersection des croyances autochtones et de (l'éco)durabilité dans une perspective de genre. À partir d'une vue d'ensemble du*

*programme de développement de la Chine et des évaluations environnementales stratégiques dans les zones minoritaires, l'auteur explore l'économie rituelle de deux communautés ethniques du sud-ouest de la province du Yunnan: Deqin (Diqing) et Yongning (Ninglang). Dans ces communautés, l'engagement des femmes dans les questions communautaires, la planification, et la gestion des ressources s'entrelacent avec le système d'échange rituel entre les humains et le monde conceptualisé des dieux territoriaux et esprits élémentaux de la nature. L'auteur se penche sur la connaissance des écosystèmes forestiers montagneux des Khamba Tibétains, des Mosuo et des Naxi, ainsi que sur le degré auquel les demandes des relations parentales, les normes religieuses et les tabous rituels motivent les choix économiques.*

**Mots-clés**
Croyances autochtones, durabilité, écologie de genre, minorités chinoises, économie rituelle

**4. Entraide et réciprocité chez les Na de Chine. Une lecture de la socialité na et de la centralité des maisons dan l'organisation sociale. - Pascale-Marie Milan 66**

*Chez les Na de Chine, où se pratique encore une agriculture de subsistance, de nombreux travaux sont menés sur l'entraide. En proposant une ethnographie des formes d'entraide, jusque-là tout au plus mentionnées dans les travaux anthropologiques sur les Na, l'article propose une lecture de l'organisation sociale élargissant l'analyse des faits de parenté de cette société matrilinéaire et matrilocale. À partir d'un cadre théorique et interprétatif de l'économie de subsistance, l'article considère les manifestations et le fonctionnement de l'entraide à différentes échelles : dans la maison, entre maisons et au regard de la communauté villageoise, et offre ainsi une lecture des valeurs éthiques qui s'en dégage. Matrice de la socialité na, l'entraide se révèle être un système de coopération structurant et réactualisant sans cesse les rapports entre maisons par le biais de réciprocités organisées en tenant compte de l'idéal matrilinéaire. Il met ainsi en lumière la complémentarité des maisons et de la matrilinéarité dans l'organisation sociale.*

**Mots-clefs**
Entraide, réciprocité, maison, matrilinéarité, socialité.

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*Among the Na of China, who still practice subsistence agriculture, much work is carried out on the basis of mutual aid. By proposing an ethnography of the forms of mutual aid, which until now have been, at most, merely mentioned in anthropological work on the Na, the article offers a reading of social organization that broadens the analysis of kinship information pertaining to this matrilineal and matrilocal society. Taking as its starting point the theoretical and interpretative framework of the subsistence economy, the author considers the manifestations and functioning of mutual aid at different scales: within the*

*household, between houses, and with regard to the village community, thereby offering a reading of the ethical values that emerge from mutual aid. As the matrix of Na sociality, mutual aid emerges as a system of cooperation that continually structures and renews the relationships between houses through reciprocities organized in was that take into account the matrilineal ideal. Mutual aid thus highlights the complementarity of houses and matrilineality within social organization.*

**Keywords**
Na, Mutual aid, reciprocity, house, matrilineality, sociality

**5. Using evolutionary theory to hypothesize a transition from patriliny to matriliny and back again among the ethnic Mosuo of Southwest China - Siobhán M. Mattison, Chun-Yi Sum, Adam Z. Reynolds, Gabrielle D. Baca, Tami Blumenfield, Sara Niedbalski, Ruizhe Liu, Meng Zhang, Lige Liu, Lin Wei, Mingjie Su, Hui Li, Mary K. Shenk, and Katherine Wander 90**

*Transitions to matriliny are said to be relatively rare. This evidence is sometimes used to support arguments that perceive matriliny as a problematic and unstable system of kinship. In this article, we use an evolutionary perspective to trace changes in kinship to and from matriliny among the Mosuo of Southwest China as potentially adaptive. The Mosuo are famous for practicing a relatively rare form of female-biased kinship involving matrilineal descent and inheritance, natalocal residence, and a non-marital reproductive system ('walking marriage' or sese). Less well documented is their patrilineal subpopulation, who practice male-biased, patrilineal inheritance and descent, patrilocal residence, and exclusive marriage. Our analysis supports the existence of a prior transition to matriliny at least a millennium ago among Mosuo residing in the Yongning Basin, followed by a subsequent transition to patriliny among Mosuo residing in the more rugged mountainous terrain near Labai. We argue that these transitions make sense in light of economic, social, and political conditions that disfavor versus favor disproportionate investments in men, in matriliny versus patriliny, respectively. We conclude that additional evidence of such transitions would shed light on explanations of variation in kinship and that convergent approaches involving analysis of genetic, archaeological, and ethnohistorical data would provide holistic understandings of kinship and social change.*

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*On considère que les transitions vers la matrilinéarité sont rares, un phénomène qui est parfois utilisé pour soutenir des arguments qui perçoivent la matrilinéarité comme un système de parenté problématique et instable. Dans cet article, les auteurs utilisent une perspective évolutionniste pour retracer les changements dans les systèmes de parenté vers la matrilinéarité ou la patrilinéarité parmi les Mosuo du sud-ouest de la Chine, et analysent ces transitions comme étant potentiellement adaptatives. Les Mosuo sont réputés pour un système de parenté relativement rare impliquant la filiation et l'héritage*

*matrilinéaires, la résidence natolocale et un système reproducteur non matrimonial («mariage ambulant» ou sese). Moins bien documentée est leur sous-population patrilinéaire, qui pratique l'héritage et la filiation patrilinéaires, la résidence patrilocale et le mariage exclusif. Notre analyse soutient l'existence d'une transition préalable vers la matrilinéarité, il y a au moins un millénaire chez les Mosuo résidant dans le bassin de Yongning, suivie d'une transition ultérieure vers la patrilinéarité chez les Mosuo résidant dans le terrain montagneux plus accidenté près de Labai. Nous soutenons que ces transitions ont un sens en vue de certaines conditions économiques, sociales et politiques qui défavorisent ou, alternativement, investissent dans les hommes de manière disproportionnée, ce qui infléchit la société vers la patrilinéarité plutôt que la matrilinéarité. Nous concluons que des preuves supplémentaires de telles transitions éclaireraient les explications de la variation des systèmes de parenté et que des approches convergentes impliquant l'analyse de données génétiques, archéologiques et ethnohistoriques fourniraient une base holistique à notre compréhension de la parenté et du changement social.*

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*Across the Sino-Tibetan Marches, the many isolated and fiercely independent kingdoms of the past have given way to small ethnic groups with unusual social organizations. The most famous is the 'husbandless' matrilineal society of the Mosuo, which has attracted the attention of scholars as well as Chinese and foreign tourists. This community, however, is not unique: the Zhaba people have similar customs, but their society is still untouched by tourism; other local populations as the Premi, Mi-nyag, and rGyal-rong also used to practice the night-visit-marriage. Women of the region enjoy sexual freedom and their standing is noticeably high. It is certainly worthy of note that this remote region was home to the foreign countries of Nüguo described in the Chinese Imperial records as de facto matriarchal queendoms until 742 CE. Based on both field trips and primary documentary sources, this paper describes the customs, beliefs, and uniqueness of the contemporary matricultures of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands and posits that these societies are descended from ancient queendoms called the Nüguo in Chinese.*

**Keywords**
Matriculture, Matriarchy, Matrilineal, Sino-Tibetan Marches, Marriage-less societies, walking-marriage, visiting-marriage, Mosuo, Zhaba, Mi-nyag, rGyal-rong, Dong Nüguo, Nüguo

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*À travers les marches sino-tibétaines, les nombreux royaumes isolés et farouchement indépendants du passé ont cédé la place à de petits groupes ethniques aux organisations sociales inhabituelles. Le plus célèbre est la société matrilinéaire «sans mari» des Mosuo,*

*qui a attiré l'attention des chercheurs ainsi que des touristes chinois et étrangers. Cette communauté, cependant, n'est pas unique: les habitants de Zhaba ont des coutumes similaires, mais leur société n'a pas encore été touchée par le tourisme; d'autres populations locales telles que les Premi, Mi-nyag et rGyal-rong pratiquaient également le mariage nocturne. Les femmes de la région jouissent de liberté sexuelle et leur statut social est visiblement élevé. Il est certainement intéressant de noter que cette région éloignée abritait les pays de Nüguo, que les archives impériales chinoises ont décrit jusqu'en 742 de notre ère comme des royaumes de facto matriarcaux. S'appuyant à la fois sur des études sur le terrain et sur des sources documentaires, l'auteure résume les coutumes, les croyances et le caractère unique des matricultures contemporaines des régions frontalières sino-tibétaines et conclut que ces sociétés descendent des 'Nüguo' ou « Pays des Femmes ».*

**Mots-clefs**
Matriculture, matriarcat, matrilinéaire, Marches sino-tibétaines, sociétés sans mariage, mariage-ambulant, mariage-visite, Mosuo, Zhaba, Mi-nyag, rGyal-rong, Dong Nüguo, Nüguo.

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*All people in the world are familiar with the tragedy of love suicide, but few societies have experienced love suicide on the scale suffered by the Naxi people of China. This paper argues that the reason the Naxi committed love suicide in dreadfully high numbers must be sought in socio-cultural changes brought about by political reforms and, in particular, in the large-scale transformation of Naxi culture that followed the integration of Lijiang into the Qing imperial administration in 1723. These reforms, implemented by appointed officials, shaped unsolvable contradictions between new rules of arranged marriages and the Naxi's own traditional views of sex and marriage. These contradictions resulted in a tragically high rate of suicide among Naxi youth and especially among young Naxi women, as well as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon. For the Naxi, love suicide became a social custom that fostered religious rituals and sacred texts about martyrdom, as well as tragic literary works romanticizing sacrifice and mystical beliefs. Love suicide was not only a grave social problem among the Naxi, it was also a peculiar cultural phenomenon involving a complex combination of social and cultural factors.*

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*Toutes les sociétés humaines connaissent la tragédie du suicide par amour, mais peu de peuples ont fait l'expérience du suicide dans des taux aussi élevés que le peuple Naxi de Chine. Le présent article argumente que la cause principale du suicide par amour chez les Naxi repose dans les changements socio-culturels créés par certaines réformes politiques, et en particulier la transformation à grande échelle de la culture naxi à la suite de l'intégration de Lijiang dans le système administratif impérial des Qing en 1723. Ces réformes, qui ont été implémentées par des fonctionnaires nommés par le gouvernement impérial,*

*ont donné suite à des contradictions irréductibles entre de nouvelles règles relatives aux marriages arrangés et les perceptions traditionelles des Naxi sur la sexualité et le mariage. Ces contradictions ont abouti à un taux de suicide effroyable parmi les jeunes Naxi et surtout parmi les jeunes femmes, mais aussi à un phénomène socio-culturel unique. Pour les Naxi, le suicide par amour est devenu une coutume qui a stimulé des rites, des textes sacrés, et des oeuvres littéraires romançant le sacrifice des amants et les croyances mystiques. Le suicide par amour était non seulement un problème social gravissime, mais aussi un phénomène culturel inédit impliquant un complexe de facteurs sociaux et culturels.*

**8. Reflections of Mosuo Lore - Lamu Gatusa 165**

*The Mosuo people of southwest China have a rich oral literature. The Mosuo Daba religion contains hundreds of ritual texts incorporating incantations, myths and legends. Over a long history, the Mosuo people have told stories about their deities, mythical and local heroes, past feudal rulers and the natural world that surrounds them. They have told stories to educate their children. They have developed proverbs that hold the moral and social teachings of the community. They have also put words to traditional tunes to express their joys and sorrows, their adventures on the caravan trail, the love between men and women and the love of their mothers. The selected texts in this small collection include stories of the Mountain Goddess Gamu, the patron deity of the Mosuo people; courtship songs; songs of motherly love; proverbs extolling the Mosuo matricultural world; and an animal fable suffused with humorous pragmatism that offers a glance into past feudal relations.*

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*Les Mosuo du sud-ouest de la Chine possèdent une riche littérature orale. La religion daba des mosuo contient des centaines de textes rituels incorporant des incantations, des mythes et des légendes. Au cours des siècles, les Mosuo se sont transmis des histoires à propos de leurs divinités, de leurs héros mythiques et locaux, de leurs anciens seigneurs féodaux et du monde naturel qui les entoure. Ils ont raconté des histoires pour éduquer leurs enfants. Ils ont développé des proverbes qui contiennent les enseignements moraux et sociaux de la communauté. Ils ont également composé des paroles sur des airs traditionnels pour exprimer leurs joies et leurs peines, leurs aventures sur le chemin des caravanes, l'amour entre hommes et femmes et l'amour de leurs mères. Les textes sélectionnés dans cette petite collection comprennent des histoires sur la déesse de la montagne, Gamu, qui est aussi la divinité patronne du peuple Mosuo; des chansons qui traduisent l'amour entre les hommes et les femmes, mais aussi l'amour des enfants pour leurs mères; des proverbes qui exaltent le monde matriculturel mosuo; et une fable animale imprégnée d'un pragmatisme rempli d'humour qui offre un regard particulier sur les relations féodales du temps passé.*

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# Introduction

(*english)*

**CHRISTINE MATHIEU, PhD**

In this Issue 1 of Volume 2, the Editorial Collective at *Matrix* sought interests from scholars working in East Asia. What does the concept of matriculture evoke in the context of this vast region? The answer is a collection of seven contributions by Yasuko Sato, Tommaso Previato, Pascale-Marie Milan, Siobhan Mattison *et al*, Frédérique Darragon, Yang Fuquan and Lamu Gatusa. The writers examine matriculture in the societies of early Japan and the Sino-Tibetan marches—Kham, Jiarong, Zhaba, Mosuo and Naxi— from distinct yet complementary perspectives: feminist anthropology, history, evolutionary theory, administrative policy, environmental practices, economics, and social organisation. The issue ends with a collection of proverbs, songs and stories in English translation which Lamu Gatusa, Mosuo scholar and poet, recorded from the oral literature of his people.

The contributors to this volume do not speak in a single voice. The matriarchy examined in Darragon's paper is almost diametrically opposed to the maternalism explored in Sato's article. Yet, common threads emerge in overlapping, connecting, and corroborating themes: relatively flexible gender roles (Sato, Milan, Yang, Darragon, Mattison); communal interdependence (Sato, Milan, Mattison); feminine sexual power (Sato, Darragon, Yang); connections to nature and to the cults of nature (Sato, Previato); female household management (Milan, Darragon, Yang, Previato); maternal and filial love (Sato, Lamu Gatusa); linguistic vitality and lyrical poetry (Sato, Yang, Lamu Gatusa). These themes guide the order in which the seven contributions are sequenced, for it is my impression that, read in this particular order, Volume 2, Issue 1 of *Matrix* tells a story that is larger than the sum of its individual parts.

**Yasuko Sato** explores the writings of feminist activist, poet, ethnologist, and historian Takamure Itsue (1894-1964). Sato proposes to treat Takamure's historical reconstructions of ancient Japanese society as ‘matricultural explorations.'

Sato begins with the ideas that inspired Takamure during her early years as a feminist activist. 'In the beginning, woman was the sun', wrote Takamure's friend and fellow activist, Hiratsuka Raichō, but women had become a dependent and sickly moon reflecting another’s brilliance. Like Hiratsuka Raichō, Takamure Itsue believed that women must reclaim the sun within themselves – the sun being their powers of generation, love, and life. Takamure Itsue was a maternal feminist who upheld maternal empowerment as the font of universal love and true empowerment.

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Takamure's historical research into pre-Heian Japan (794-1185 CE) nourished her feminist ideals, particularly when she discovered a matricultural, animist, gender-egalitarian, and clan-based society. Takamure found that this ancient society, in which uxorilocal and duolocal patterns of residence organised family relationships and descent, and poetic lyricism rather than contract and procedure ruled love between women and men, possessed many elements in common with the matrilineal societies anthropologists have described in other parts of the world, and in particular, the Iroquois confederacy of North America and the Minangkabau of Indonesia. Yasuko Sato extends Takamure's anthropological interests by comparing her reconstructions of ancient Japanese society with the socio-cultural mode at work among the Mosuo people of Southwestern China.

Takamure saw in matricentric societies a model for the future of humanity and an antidote to the commercial, urban-based, patriarchal social structures that reduce men as well as women to various modes of servitude, and nature to destruction. Yasuko Sato's article makes a feminist plea for a kinder, nurturing, gender-egalitarian world based on Takamure's own vision of a benevolent past and the possibility of a better future.

**Tommaso Previato** is concerned with the intersection of eco-sustainability, development policies, Indigenous beliefs, and gender practices in southwestern China. Previato discusses China's economic development and environmental policies in the context of the ritual economy of two ethnic communities of the southwestern province of Yunnan: respectively, Deqin (Diqing) and Yongning (Ninglang). Current government policies of economic development and environmental sustainability, Previato writes, are informed by scientific and technological understandings. These leave little room for the traditional practices and knowledge informed by local religious and cultural traditions in which women play significant roles.

Previato refrains from appealing to an intrinsic metaphysical relationship between women and nature that reproduces negative traditional dichotomies of women as nature and men as culture. However, he does argue that Indigenous religious traditions and women's roles within them have long made significant and worthwhile contributions to environmental sustainability. Amongst the Khamba and the Mosuo, as amongst other Himalayan people, kinship patterns and animistic beliefs are essential to preventing environmental over-exploitation and preserving natural environments. In Deqin, women are at the economic and affective center of patrilineal polyandrous households and act as household heads alongside their husbands or even on their own. On the ritual front, men are closely involved in the Buddhist tradition while women have the primary ritual responsibility to propitiate the *klu* spirits of nature upon whom the fertility and the health of crops, animals, and, ultimately, humans depend. The Mosuo people of Yongning inhabit a matricultural and feminized landscape. Their tutelary goddess is the divine mountain Gamu, located on the shore of Lake Lugu, the Mother Lake. Like the *klu* spirits, Gamu is responsible for the fertility of people, animals, and crops.

Previato shows that taboos associated with the spirits of nature in Yongning, as in Deqin, prevent deforestation, illegal lumbering, overhunting, the fouling of waterways, and so forth, any of which might elicit the wrath of the gods and spirits of nature, with consequences for the health of crops, animals, and people. He argues that women's engagement with their community, ritual exchanges between people and nature, responsible planning, and the management of resources are interdependent. Previato concludes that kin-based arrangements, religious norms, and taboos,

however interesting in themselves, also motivate economic choices essential to successful environmental policy making.

**Pascale-Marie Milan** explores practices of cooperation among the Na (Mosuo) people of the mountain village of Lijiazui. Removed from the tourist economy of the Yongning basin, the Na of Lijiazui practise subsistence agriculture, as they have done for centuries. To meet the necessities of everyday life and to accomplish the demanding tasks of agricultural labour, wood-cutting, and house building, Na families depend on the cooperation of household members and on broader networks of friendship and mutual aid. In examining Na practices of mutual aid and the moral economy entwined in these practices, Milan analyses an aspect of Na society that has received relatively scant attention from anthropologists, who have focused on gender and kinship. Anthropologists have been especially interested in the question of whether Mosuo society should be regarded as matrilineal or house-based. In the simplest terms, the 'house' may be understood here as a social unit of mixed composition focused on its own reproduction rather than on the continuity of a lineage. Among the Na, the house includes the people and the animals who live within the walls of the architectural structure. Constructed according to symbolic rules and principles, the Na house is a representation or, rather, a manifestation of the cosmos. In fact, Milan's discussion makes significant contributions to both the field of Na moral and material economics, and the field of Na kinship.

While Milan agrees that the house is the fundamental unit of Na society, she extends the analytical field to the matrilineage, and beyond the matrilineage to the village. She provides the emic perspective that the composition of the Na house is dependent on the ability of households to meet two essential needs: the everyday provision of the necessities of life (household labour) and the reproduction of the house itself (biological reproduction). Both of these continuities are dependent on a certain gender ratio. Hence, houses may adopt children of either sex, taking in a ‘son-in-law’ if having only daughters, in order to meet their material needs, or a ‘daughter-in-law’ to meet biological reproductive needs. Milan then shows that descent and the matrilineal standard play a major role in these decisions. New house members are recruited on the basis of genealogical relatedness and of their belonging to the same matrilineage. However, the members of a house may also decide to make do with an unbalanced gender ratio in order to maintain the consanguineous composition of their household when they are confident that the mutual aid system will allow them to meet their labour needs.

Milan's ethnography reveals that mutual aid practices form a true system of cooperation which functions on a hierarchy of preferences and modalities in which degrees of kinship relatedness play a fundamental role. She concludes that anthropological theory needs to differentiate between the Na ideal system, which is matrilineal, and the practical adaptations which Na households make in order to meet the necessities of existence. The latter do not cancel out the Mosuo matrilineal system or Mosuo matriculture.

**Siobhan Mattison** heads a team of fourteen researchers studying the development of the Mosuo dual-descent kinship system from a multi-disciplinary and evolutionary perspective. The joint authors investigate the transitions that may have led to the existence of a matrilineal system in the Yongning basin and a patrilineal system in Labei among people with a single culture, a common language, and a shared identity.

The authors begin by contextualizing their approach and clarifying how contemporary evolutionary anthropological theory differs from Bachofen, Morgan, and Engels' constructs. Engels and Marx's theory of cultural evolution became a core doctrine of Chinese communist discourse generally and a core principle of the Chinese social sciences after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From the perspective of Chinese social sciences (history and ethnology), matriliny and matriarchy are not differentiated as they are in Western anthropology. Just as importantly, in both classic evolutionary anthropological theory and Engels-Marxian historical materialism, matriliny/matriarchy and patriliny/patriarchy are inevitable stages of development obeying historical law. Accordingly, matriliny must precede patriliny and not the other way around.

The authors make clear that while contemporary evolutionary theory attempts to understand and find explanations for the diversity of human kinship systems, it departs from the unilineal and universal theories that typify classic evolutionary approaches in anthropology. Contemporary evolutionary anthropological theory is interested in the factors that may establish the central role of women or alternatively limit the role of men in any given social system. The authors signal two correlates of matriliny: matrilineal systems exist alongside low paternity investment, in which men see little advantage to investing in offspring they cannot be sure they have fathered, and within economic systems that do not benefit men disproportionately. But whether from a classic evolutionary anthropological perspective or a contemporary one, Mosuo society with its dual matrilineal and patrilineal system raises questions: how did these differences in kinship norms arise in a single cultural and social context?  Did Mosuo society originate in matriliny, patriliny, or yet another system?

Mattison *et al*. explore these questions in the context of the matrilineal villages of the Yongning basin and the patrilineal villages of Labei. DNA data analysis supports a transition to matriliny about a millennium ago among the Mosuo people of Yongning, and a later transition among the people residing in Labei, followed by yet another transition from matriliny to patriliny among the people of Labei about two hundred and fifty years ago. Taking into consideration data from historical, ethnohistorical and kinship studies, the authors conclude that matricultural ideals define Mosuo society whether Mosuo families are matrilineal, patrilineal or conjugal-nuclear.

**Frédérique Darragon** discusses the social customs of the people of the Sino-Tibetan borderland: Zhaba, Mi Nyag, Jiarong (rGyal-rong') and Mosuo. She posits their origins in the Eastern Nüguo, a queendom of the east recorded in the Sui (581-605 CE) and Tang (618-907 CE) *Histories*. Darragon's paper opens on a description of societies where women have sexual freedom and high social status, which she notes are in sharp contrast with Tibetan customs.

On the basis of linguistic, cultural, and historical data, Darragon argues that the matricultures of Sichuan and Yunnan have significant historical depth and links to the Qiang cultural sphere. Darragon links the marriage-less societies of Sichuan and Yunnan to the matriarchal (Qiang) state of Dong Nüguo (Eastern Queendom). She attributes the survival of matricultural modes of these contemporary societies to the resilience of a cultural system that offers advantages to both women and men, and to the particularities of Chinese Imperial policies which, during many centuries of indirect rule, refrained from Sinicizing the fiercely independent people who lived in impassable mountain terrains on the margins of the empire.

Darragon then turns her attention to the Chinese historical records, providing a previously unpublished inventory of sources that mention the Nüguo. No fewer than seventeen tributary

missions were sent from the Nüguo to the Chinese Imperial court between the sixth and tenth centuries CE. The documents provide the names of queens and their envoys, as well as information about the roles of women and men in politics, economy, and war. Darragon concludes that the Nüguo afford not only historical evidence of the origins of matricultures in the Sino-Tibetan Marches, but also proof of the historical existence of matriarchy. This last is a concept fiercely resisted not only in anthropological theory but also among feminist scholars, among whom some have redefined the term *matriarchy* as matricentric or matrifocal and not the reverse of patriarchy. Darragon notes that, in contrast to their Western counterparts, Chinese scholars are not troubled by the idea that women could rule over men and that they could have done so in historical times. Darragon explains this difference of perspective in light of the particularities of Chinese intellectual and philosophical traditions, and the particularities of Chinese historiography. For Darragon, matriarchy means the rule of women. She argues that, in light of the Chinese historical record, academic reticence regarding the historical possibility of women's rule amounts to an indefensible taboo anchored in persistent gender prejudice.

**Yang Fuquan** is a professor and former vice-president of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. A member of the Naxi nationality, Yang Fuquan has spent decades recording and studying the tangible and intangible culture of the Naxi people. For this issue of *Matrix*, he has contributed an essay on the history of the Naxi love suicide custom. As recently as the mid-twentieth century, love suicide had such high romantic value among Naxi youth that it had become customary, causing young people to die in alarming numbers. The love suicide custom was extinguished post-1949, following the newly-established Communist authorities' abolition of arranged marriage and their implementation of free-choice marriage.

Yang Fuquan book-ends his essay by drawing attention to the fact that the Naxi love suicide custom was a complex phenomenon intrinsically attached to Naxi cultural modes, economics, history, and politics. In this essay, he has opted to focus on the policies of assimilation which the Qing emperors imposed on the Naxi during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1723, after centuries of indirect Imperial rule characterised by non-interference in local customs, the Qing emperor mandated the naturalisation of the Naxi into the Imperial system of administration. The mandate imposed Confucian moral and ritual norms on the Naxi, forcing the local population to comply with extensive customary changes and to adopt new cultural attitudes. Chinese ideas about family and decent, the status of women, notions of chastity, and ritual pollution were imposed on the Naxi's traditionally flexible patrilineal family arrangements. Women suffered tremendously, and like the women Takamure Itsui encountered in Heian Japan, Naxi women expressed their grief and resentment in songs. Invoking historical sources and referencing a range of cultural data, Yang argues that Naxi women had once benefited from the sexual freedom and high social status customarily enjoyed by women of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. Furthermore, Yang writes, even after 1723, Naxi society was not evenly Confucianized: Qing magistrates never managed to establish gender segregation among the Naxi and youths continued to engage in pre-marital love affairs, even though betrothal arrangements had become immutable and unwed pregnancy now imposed an unbearable and unforgivable disgrace. When Confucian expectations blended with the age-old customs of free love and traditional romantic ideals, Naxi girls chose romantic love over arranged marriage, and suicide over social ignominy.

**Lamu Gatusa** closes these discussions with a collection of pieces from Mosuo oral literature recorded in the 1980s and presented here in English translation. Lamu was born in Labei and is a member of the Mosuo people. He is a senior academic at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

and a poet. In 1992, Lamu Gatusa and I spent several months in Kunming reading his translations of Mosuo literature into Chinese, which I then transcribed and translated into English. The work was especially rewarding as Lamu Gatusa explained every nuance and subtlety, and contextualised metaphors and cultural references. In all, we translated an estimated tenth of Mosuo Ddaba ritual literature, including wedding (Labei) and funeral songs. We also translated songs dedicated to mothers and to lovers, songs about the horse caravan, proverbs, myths, and fables. The texts selected for this issue illustrate the themes presented in the six articles summarised above, and shine a light on Mosuo matriculture from within. Lamu Gatusa provides short background discussions and explanations to contextualise the stories and aspects of the poetic language that are inevitably lost in translation.

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# Introduction

(*français*)

**CHRISTINE MATHIEU, PhD**

Dans ce numéro 1 du volume 2, le collectif éditorial de *Matrix* a sollicité les intérêts de chercheurs travaillant en Asie Orientale. Qu'évoque le concept de matriculture dans le contexte de cette vaste région? La réponse est un recueil de sept contributions par Yasuko Sato, Tommaso Previato, Pascale-Marie Milan, Siobhan Mattison *et al*., Frédérique Darragon, Yang Fuquan et Lamu Gatusa. Les auteurs abordent le système matriculturel dans la société du Japon ancien et des marches sino-tibétaines — Kham, Jiarong, Zhaba, Mosuo et Naxi —de points de vue différents mais complémentaires : l'anthropologie féministe, l'histoire, la théorie évolutionniste, la politique administrative, les pratiques environnementales, l'économie, et l'organisation sociale. Le numéro 1 conclut avec un recueil de traductions anglaises de proverbes, chansons et contes provenant de la tradition orale de Mosuo enregistrés par le poète et chercheur mosuo Lamu Gatusa.

Les contributeurs de ce volume ne parlent pas d'une seule voix. Le matriarcat exploré dans l'article de Darragon est en contradiction presqu'absolue avec la position maternaliste de l'article de Sato. Pourtant, des fils communs émergent dans des thèmes qui se chevauchent, se connectent et se corroborent : les rôles de genre relativement flexibles (Sato, Milan, Yang, Darragon, Mattison) ; l'interdépendance communautaire (Sato, Milan, Mattison) ; le pouvoir sexuel féminin (Sato, Darragon, Yang) ; les liens avec la nature et avec les cultes de la nature (Sato, Previato) ; la gestion féminine du ménage (Milan, Darragon, Yang, Previato) ; l'amour maternel et filial (Sato, Lamu Gatusa) ; la vitalité linguistique et la poésie lyrique (Sato, Yang, Lamu Gatusa). Ces thèmes ont décidé de l'ordre dans lequel les sept contributions sont présentées, car j'ai l'impression que, lu dans cet ordre, le numéro 1, volume 2, de *Matrix* raconte une histoire plus important que la somme de ses différentes parties

**Yasuko Sato** explore les écrits de Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), militante féministe, poète, ethnologue et historienne. Sato propose que le travail de Takamure sur les reconstructions historiques de l'ancienne société japonaise puisse être traité comme une « exploration matriculturelle ».

Sato ouvre la discussion avec les idées qui ont inspiré Takamure pendant ses premières années de militante féministe. «Au début, la femme était le soleil», écrivait Hiratsuka Raichõ, l'amie et

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collègue activiste de Takamure, mais les femmes étaient devenues une lune dépendante et maladive reflétant l'éclat d'un autre. Comme Hiratsuka Raichõ, Takamure Itsue pensait que les femmes devaient retrouver le soleil en elles-mêmes - le soleil étant la source génératrice de leur pouvoir d'amour et de vie. Féministe maternaliste, Takamure Itsue a défendu l'autonomie maternelle comme source d'amour universel et de pouvoir.

Les recherches de Takamure sur la période pré-Heian du Japon (794-1185) ont nourri ses idéaux féministes, en particulier lorsqu'elle a découvert une société fortement matriculturelle, animiste, égalitaire entre les sexes, et basée sur le clan. Takamure a découvert que cette ancienne société, dans laquelle les modèles de résidence uxorilocale et duolocale organisaient les relations familiales et la filiation, et le lyrisme poétique plutôt que le contrat et la procédure régissaient l'amour entre les femmes et les hommes, possédait de nombreux éléments communs avec les sociétés matrilinéaires que les anthropologues ont décrites dans d'autres parties du monde, et en particulier, avec la confédération iroquoise d'Amérique du Nord et les Minangkabau d'Indonésie. Yasuko Sato étend les intérêts anthropologiques de Takamure en comparant ses reconstructions de l'ancienne société japonaise avec le mode socio-culturel mosuo observé parmi les habitants du sud-ouest de la Chine.

Pour Takamure, les sociétés matricentriques offrent un modèle pour l'avenir de l'humanité et un antidote aux structures patriarcales, commerciales et urbaines qui réduisent les hommes et les femmes à divers modes de servitude et conduisent la nature à sa destruction. L'article de Yasuko Sato est un plaidoyer féministe pour un monde plus doux, nourricier et égalitaire entre les sexes, basé sur la vision de Takamure d'un passé bienveillant et la possibilité d'un meilleur avenir.

**Thomas Previato** traite de l'intersection de l'éco-durabilité, des politiques de développement, des croyances autochtones et des pratiques de genre dans le sud-ouest de la Chine. Previato examine la politique chinoise pour le développement économique et environnemental dans le contexte de l'économie rituelle de deux communautés ethniques du sud-ouest de la province du Yunnan, respectivement, Deqin (Diqing) et Yongning (Ninglang). Les politiques gouvernementales actuelles concernant le développement économique et la durabilité environnementale, écrit Previato, sont fondées sur des connaissances scientifiques et technologiques. Celles-ci laissent peu de place aux pratiques et connaissances traditionnelles inspirées par la tradition religieuse et culturelle locale, dans laquelle les femmes jouent un rôle important.

Previato s'abstient de faire appel à une relation métaphysique intrinsèque entre les femmes et la nature qui reproduit les dichotomies négatives traditionnelles identifiant les femmes avec la nature et les hommes avec la culture. Cependant, il soutient que les traditions religieuses autochtones et le rôle des femmes au sein de ces traditions ont depuis longtemps apporté d'importantes contributions à la durabilité environnementale. Chez les Khamba et les Mosuo, comme parmi d'autres peuples himalayens, les modèles de parenté et les croyances animistes continuent de jouer un rôle essentiel dans la prévention de la surexploitation de l'environnement et la préservation des milieux naturels. À Deqin, les femmes sont au cœur économique et affectif de ménages polyandres patrilinéaires et agissent en tant que chefs de famille aux côtés de leur mari ou même seules. Sur le plan rituel, les hommes sont étroitement impliqués dans la tradition bouddhiste tandis que les femmes ont la responsabilité principale du rituel de propitiation des *klu* (esprits de la nature) dont dépendent la fertilité et la santé des cultures, des animaux et,

finalement, des humains. Les Mosuo de Yongning habitent un paysage matriculturel et féminisé. Leur déesse tutélaire est la divine Montagne Gamu située sur les rives du lac Lugu, le lac Mère. Comme les esprits klu, Gamu est responsable de la fertilité des personnes, des animaux et des cultures.

Previato discute des tabous associés aux esprits de la nature à Yongning, comme dans le Deqin, qui empêchent la déforestation, l'exploitation forestière illégale, la chasse excessive, la pollution des cours d'eau, etc., actions qui peuvent toutes susciter la colère des dieux et des esprits de la nature, avec des conséquences sur la santé des cultures, des animaux et des personnes. Il soutient que l'engagement des femmes dans leur communauté, les échanges rituels entre les personnes et la nature, la planification responsable, et la gestion des ressources sont interdépendants. Previato conclut que les arrangements basés sur la parenté, les normes religieuses et les tabous, intéressants en eux-mêmes, motivent également des choix économiques essentiels à l'élaboration positive des politiques environnementales.

**Pascal-Maria Milan** examine les pratiques de coopération entre les Na (Mosuo) du village montagnard de Lijiazui. À l'écart de l'économie touristique du bassin du Yongning, les Na de Lijiazui pratiquent une agriculture de subsistance, comme ils le font depuis des siècles. Pour répondre aux nécessités de la vie quotidienne et accomplir les tâches exigeantes du travail agricole, de la coupe du bois et de la construction de maisons, les familles Na dépendent de la coopération des membres du ménage et de réseaux plus larges d'amitié et d'entraide. En examinant les pratiques d'entraide et l'économie morale enracinée dans ces pratiques, Milan analyse un aspect de la société Na qui a reçu relativement peu d'attention de la part des anthropologues, qui se sont concentrés sur le genre et la parenté. Les anthropologues se sont particulièrement intéressés à la question de savoir si la société mosuo doit être considérée comme matrilinéaire ou basée sur la maison. Dans les termes les plus simples, la «maison» peut être comprise ici comme une unité sociale de composition mixte centrée sur sa propre reproduction plutôt que sur la continuité d'une lignée. Parmi les Na, la maison comprend les personnes et les animaux qui vivent entre les murs de la structure architecturale. Construite selon des règles et des principes symboliques, la maison Na est une représentation ou plutôt une manifestation du cosmos. En fait, la discussion de Milan apporte des contributions significatives au domaine de l'économie morale et matérielle Na, ainsi qu'au domaine de la parenté Na.

Si Milan convient que la maison est l'unité fondamentale de la société Na, elle étend le champ analytique au matrilignage et au-delà du matrilignage jusqu'au village. Elle offre la perspective émique que la composition de la maison Na dépend de la capacité des ménages à répondre à deux exigences de base : la satisfaction des besoins de la vie quotidienne (travaux ménagers) et la reproduction de la maison elle-même (reproduction biologique). Ces deux continuités dépendent d'un certain ratio hommes / femmes. Ainsi, les maisons peuvent adopter des enfants de l'un ou l'autre sexe, en accueillant un « gendre » s'ils n'ont que des filles, afin de subvenir à leurs besoins matériels, ou une « belle-fille » pour répondre aux besoins biologiques reproductifs. Milan montre alors que la filiation et le standard matrilinéaire jouent un rôle majeur dans ces décisions. Les nouveaux membres de la maison sont recrutés sur la base de la parenté généalogique et de leur appartenance au même matrilignage. Cependant, les membres d'une même maison peuvent également décider de se contenter d'un rapport de genre déséquilibré afin de maintenir la

composition consanguine de leur ménage lorsqu'ils sont convaincus que le système d'entraide leur permettra de répondre à leurs besoins en main-d'œuvre.

L'ethnographie de Milan révèle que les pratiques d'entraide forment un véritable système de coopération qui fonctionne selon une hiérarchie de préférences et de modalités dans laquelle les degrés de parenté jouent un rôle fondamental. Elle conclut que la théorie anthropologique doit faire la différence entre le système idéal Na, qui est matrilinéaire, et les adaptations pratiques que les ménages Na font afin de répondre aux nécessités de l'existence. Ces derniers n'annulent ni le système matrilinéaire mosuo ni le système matriculturel des Mosuo.

**Siobhan Mattison** dirige une équipe de quatorze chercheurs qui étudient l'évolution du système à double descendance des Mosuo selon une perspective multidisciplinaire et évolutionniste. Les co-auteurs explorent les transitions qui ont pu conduire à l'existence d'un système matrilinéaire dans le bassin de Yongning et d'un système patrilinéaire à Labei, au sein d'une population qui parage une culture unique, une langue commune et une même identité.

Les auteurs contextualisent leur approche. et clarifient en quoi la théorie évolutionniste anthropologique contemporaine se différencie de la théorie de Bachofen, de Morgan et d'Engels. La théorie évolutionniste d'Engels et de Marx a été intégrée dans le discours communiste chinois où elle constitue un principe fondamental des sciences sociales chinoises depuis la création de la République populaire de Chine en 1949. Du point de vue des sciences sociales chinoises (histoire et ethnologie) la matrilinéarité et le matriarcat ne sont pas différenciés comme ils le sont dans l'anthropologie occidentale. Dans la théorie évolutionniste anthropologique classique ainsi que dans la conception marxienne du déterminisme historique, la matrilinéarité et le matriarcat tout comme la patrilinéarité et le patriarcat sont des étapes de développement inévitables qui obéissent aux lois de l'histoire. Dans cette perspective, la matrilinéarité précède obligatoirement la patrilinéarité.

Les auteurs précisent que si la théorie évolutionniste contemporaine tente de comprendre et de trouver des explications à la diversité des systèmes de parenté humaine, elle s'écarte des théories unilinéaires et universelles qui caractérisent l'approche évolutionniste classique en anthropologie. La théorie évolutionniste anthropologique contemporaine s'intéresse aux facteurs qui peuvent établir le rôle central des femmes ou, alternativement, limiter le rôle des hommes dans un système social donné. Les auteurs signalent deux corrélats de la matrilinéarité: les systèmes matrilinéaires existent en parallèle à une paternité à faible investissement où les hommes ne voient que peu d'avantages à investir dans une progéniture qu'ils ne peuvent pas être certains d'avoir engendrée, et dans des systèmes économiques dont les hommes ne peuvent pas tirer profit de manière disproportionnée. Mais que ce soit d'un point de vue évolutionniste anthropologique classique ou contemporain, le double système mosuo, qui accommode la matrilinéairité et patrilinéarité, soulève des questions : comment ces différences de normes de parenté sont-elles apparues conjointement dans le mêmel contexte culturel et social? La société mosuo trouve-t-elle ses origines dans un système matrilinéaire, ou dans un système patrilinéaire ou même encore dans un autre système?

Mattison *et al*. explorent ces questions dans le contexte des villages matrilinéaires du bassin Yongning et des villages patrilinéaires de Labei. L'analyse des données ADN soutient une transition

vers la matrilinéarité il y a environ un millénaire chez les Mosuo de Yongning, et une transition ultérieure chez les Mosuo de Labei, suivie d'une autre transition de la matrilinéarité à la patrilinéarité à Labei il y a environ deux cent cinquante ans. Prenant en considération les données d'études historiques, ethnohistoriques, et de parenté, les auteurs concluent que les idéaux matriculturels définissent la société mosuo, que les familles Mosuo soient matrilinéaires, patrilinéaires ou conjugales-nucléaires.

**Frédérique Darragon** discute des coutumes sociales des habitants de la frontière sino-tibétaine : les Zhaba, les Mi Nyag, les Jiarong (rGyal-rong) et les Mosuo. Elle postule leurs origines dans le Nüguo de l'Est, un royaume gouverné par une reine, noté et décrit dans les *Histoires* Sui (581-605) et Tang (618-907). L'article de Darragon ouvre sur une description de sociétés où les femmes jouissent d'une liberté sexuelle et d'un statut social élevé, ce qui, selon elle, contraste fortement avec les coutumes tibétaines.

Sur la base de données linguistiques, culturelles et historiques, Darragon soutient que les matricultures du Sichuan et du Yunnan ont des origines historiques profondes et des liens culturels avec la sphère des Qiang. Darragon relie les sociétés sans mariage du Sichuan et du Yunnan au royaume matriarcal (Qiang) de Dong Nüguo [« Royaume des femmes de l'Est »]. Elle attribue la survivance des modes matriculturels de ces sociétés contemporaines à la résilience d'un système culturel qui offre des avantages aussi bien aux femmes qu'aux hommes, et aux spécificités de la politique impériale chinoise, qui, pendant de nombreux siècles de gouvernance indirecte, s'est abstenue de siniciser les peuples farouchement indépendants des territoires montagneux et infranchissables des marges de l'empire.

Darragon examine les archives historiques chinoises, et fournit un inventaire inédit des sources faisant mention des Nüguo. Au moins dix-sept missions tributaires ont été envoyées des Nüguo à la cour impériale chinoise entre le sixième et le dixième siècle de notre ère. Les documents donnent les noms des reines et de leurs envoyés, ainsi que des informations sur le rôle des femmes et des hommes dans la politique, l'économie et la guerre. Darragon conclut que les Nüguo offrent non seulement des preuves des origines historiques des matricultures des marches sino-tibétaines, mais aussi la preuve de l'existence historique du matriarcat. Ce dernier est un concept farouchement résisté dans les théories anthropologiques mais aussi par de nouvelles théories féministes selon lesquelles le matriarcat signifierait un système matricentrique ou matrifocal et non pas un patriarcat inversé au profit des femmes. Darragon note que, contrairement à leurs homologues occidentaux, les universitaires chinois ne sont pas contrariés par l'idée que les femmes puissent gouverner les hommes et qu'elles auraient pu le faire à l'époque historique. Darragon explique cette différence de perspective à la lumière des particularités des traditions intellectuelles et philosophiques chinoises, et des particularités de l'historiographie chinoise. Pour Darragon, le matriarcat signifie un gouvernement par les femmes. Elle soutient qu'au vu des archives historiques chinoises, la réticence à admettre la possibilité historique de la domination féminine équivaut à un tabou indéfendable enraciné dans des préjugés sexistes persistants.

**Yang Fuquan** est professeur et ex-vice-président de l'Académie des sciences sociales du Yunnan. Membre de la « nationalité » naxi, Yang Fuquan a travaillé pendant plusieurs décennies à enregistrer et à étudier la culture tangible et intangible du peuple naxi. Pour ce numéro de *Matrix*, il a rédigé un essai sur l'histoire de la coutume du suicide par amour chez les Naxi. Jusqu'au milieu

du XXe siècle, le suicide par amour avait une telle valeur romantique chez les jeunes Naxis qu'il était devenu coutumier, provoquant la mort de jeunes gens en nombre alarmant. La coutume du suicide par amour s'est éteinte après 1949, après que les autorités communistes eurent proscrit les mariages arrangés, et que le mariage libre fût décrété et appliqué.

Yang Fuquan ouvre et conclut son essai en attirant l'attention sur le fait que la coutume du suicide par amour des Naxi est un phénomène complexe intrinsèquement lié aux modes culturels, économiques, historiques et politiques naxis. Dans cet essai, il a choisi de se concentrer sur les politiques d'assimilation que les empereurs Qing ont imposées aux Naxi durant les XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. En 1723, après des siècles d'une domination impériale indirecte caractérisée par la non-ingérence dans les coutumes locales, l'empereur Qing a mandaté la naturalisation des Naxi dans le système d'administration impériale. Le mandat a imposé les normes morales et rituelles confucéennes aux Naxi, obligeant la population locale à se conformer à des changements de coutume importants et d'adopter de nouvelles attitudes culturelles. Les idées chinoises sur la famille et la descendance, sur le statut de la femme, sur la chasteté et la pollution rituelle, ont été superposées aux anciennes coutumes patrilinéaires mais souples des Naxi. Les femmes ont énormément souffert, et comme les femmes que Takamure Itsui a découvertes dans le Japon heian, les femmes naxi ont exprimé leurs peines et leur ressentiment dans des chants. Invoquant des sources historiques et faisant référence à une gamme de données culturelles, Yang soutient que les femmes naxi avaient autrefois bénéficié de la liberté sexuelle et du statut social élevé dont jouissent encore aujourd'hui les femmes des régions frontalières sino-tibétaines. De plus, soutient Yang, même après 1723, la société naxi n'a pas été confucianisée de manière uniforme : les magistrats des Qing n'ont jamais réussi à établir la ségrégation des sexes parmi les Naxi. De ce fait, les jeunes ont continué à s'engager dans des relations amoureuses prénuptiales, même si les accords de fiançailles étaient devenus immuables et que les grossesses hors mariage entraînaient désormais une disgrâce insupportable car impardonnable. Lorsque les idéaux confucéens ont été intégrés aux anciennes coutumes de l'amour libre et aux idées romantiques traditionnelles, les jeunes femmes naxi ont préféré l'amour romantique au mariage arrangé et elles ont choisi le suicide pour échapper à l'ignominie sociale.

**Lamu Gatusa** clôt ces discussions avec une collection de chants, proverbes et contes puisés dans la littérature orale mosuo, enregistrés dans les années 1980, et présentés ici en traduction anglaise. Lamu est né à Labei et est membre du peuple mosuo. Il est chercheur à l'Académie des sciences sociales du Yunnan et poète. En 1992, Lamua Gatusa et moi avons passé plusieurs mois à Kunming à lire et étudier ses traductions chinoises de la littérature mosuo, que j'ai ensuite transcrites et traduites en anglais. Ce travail était particulièrement gratifiant car Lamu Gatusa a expliqué et mis en contexte chaque nuance et subtilité des métaphores et des références culturelles. En tout, nous avons traduit environ un dixième de la littérature rituelle des Mosuo Ddaba, y compris des chants de mariage (Labei) et des chants funéraires. Nous avons aussi traduit des chansons dédiées aux mères et aux amants, des chansons sur de chevaux, des proverbes, des mythes et des fables. Les textes sélectionnés pour ce numéro illustrent les thèmes présentés dans les six articles résumés ci-dessus et offrent une perspective émique sur la matriculture mosuo. Lamu Gatusa fournit de brèves discussions de fond et des explications pour contextualiser les histoires et les aspects du langage poétique qui sont inévitablement perdus dans la traduction.

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# "In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun": Takamure Itsue's Historical Reconstructions as Matricultural Explorations

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**Abstract**

*Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), the most distinguished pioneer of feminist historiography in Japan, identified Japan's antiquity as a matricultural society with the use of the phrase 'women-centered culture'* (josei chūshin no bunka). *The ancient classics of Japan informed her about the maternalistic values embodied in matrilocal residence patterns, and in women's beauty, intelligence, and radiance. Her scholarship provided the first strictly empirical verification of the famous line from Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971), "In the beginning, woman was the sun." Takamure recognized matricentric structures as the socioeconomic conditions necessary for women to express their inner genius, participate fully in public life, and live like goddesses. This paper explores Takamure's reconstruction of the marriage rules of ancient Japanese society and her pursuit of the underlying principles of matriculture. Like Hiratsuka, Takamure was a maternalist feminist who advocated the centrality of women's identity as mothers in feminist struggles and upheld maternal empowerment as the ultimate basis of women's empowerment. This epochal insight into the 'woman question' merits serious analytic attention because the principle of formal equality still visibly disadvantages women with children.*

**Keywords**

Japanese women, Ancient Japan, matriculture, Takamure Itsue, Hiratsuka Raicho

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*Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), pionière éminente de l'historiographie feministe au Japon, a découvert dans l'antiquité japonaise une société matricuturelle qu'elle a identifiée comme: une 'société centrée sur les femmes'* (josei chūshin no bunka) *ou société gynocentrique.*

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*Elle a découvert dans les oeuvres classiques japonaises des valeurs maternalistes incarnées dans les formes de résidence matrilocale, ainsi que dans ce qu'elle perçu comme la beauté, l'intelligence et le rayonnement des femmes. L'oeuvre de Takamure a ainsi fourni la première vérification empirique des célèbres paroles de Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971): "Au commencement, la femme était le soleil'. Pour Takamure, les structures matricentriques fournissent les conditions socio-économiques essentielles permettant aux femmes d'exprimer leur génie intérieur, de participer pleinement à la vie publique, et de vivre comme des déesses. Cet article explore la reconstruction par Takamure des règles de mariage de l'ancienne société japonaise et sa recherche des principes matriculturels sous-jacents. Comme Hiratsuka, Takamure était une féministe maternaliste qui prônait, dans les luttes féministes, la centralité de l'identité des femmes en tant que mères. Pour Takamure, l'émancipation maternelle est la base ultime de l'émancipation des femmes. Sa lucidité révolutionaire sur 'la question de la femme' mérite une analyse sérieuse car les inégalités de genre touchent encore visiblement les femmes avec des enfants.*

**Mots-clés**
Femme japonaise, Japon ancien, matriculture, Takamure Itsue. Hiratsuka Raicho.

Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), distinguished pioneer in the historiography of Japanese women, identifies pre-Heian (pre-794) Japan as a matricultural society – in her own words: a 'women-centered culture' (*josei chūshin no bunka*).[1] She also claims that a 'women's culture' (*josei bunka*) lasted until the Kamakura period (1186-1336) of medieval Japan, while declining gradually under the impact of patriarchal assumptions and institutions.[2] Takamure's scholarship provided the first strictly empirical verification of the famous line from feminist writer and activist Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971), 'In the beginning, woman was the sun,' as Hiratsuka herself acknowledges.[3] What do these words imply? Did women live like the sun at the dawn of Japanese civilization? This paper explores how Takamure fleshed out the historical details of Hiratsuka's intuitive understanding of Japan's ancient heritage, with primary attention to matricultural formulations.

Reconstructing the marriage rules of ancient Japanese society and seeking out the underlying principles of matriculture, Takamure upheld maternal empowerment as the ultimate basis of women's empowerment. Like Hiratsuka, Takamure was a maternalist feminist who emphasized the centrality of women's identity as mothers. Takamure's conviction was that matricentric structures were necessary socioeconomic conditions for women to participate fully in public life, unleash their inner genius, and shine their radiance like the sun.

In line with matricultures in other corners of the world, including the Mosuo people of southwestern China, Takamure presents ancient Japan as an egalitarian, female-friendly society. Matrifocality represented a world apart, with maternal orientations and concerns embodying spiritual peace,

1 *Josei no rekishi I*, in *Takamure Itsue zenshū*, 10 vols. (Tokyo: Rironsha, 1965-1967), 4:118-38. Hereafter *TIz*.
2 Ibid., 4:226-27.
3 Hiratsuka Raichō, *Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta: Hiratsuka Raichō jiden* (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shoten, 1992), 4:300.

cosmic harmony, and reverence for nature. The clan systems, combined with geographical barriers, gave rise to decentralized communities that practiced subsistence agriculture, fostered a culture of life-giving interdependence, and nurtured mother-centered paradigms. The ancient classics, written against this background, informed Takamure about women's beauty and intelligence. She was particularly drawn to women's spiritual powers, the generative powers of life and love that could overcome obstacles in times of crisis. From her perspective, thinking and acting maternally entails cherishing, nurturing, and protecting life. Takamure affirms matricultural wisdom as a total way of life that manifests in full measure women's strength, courage, and community spirit.

Takamure's linguistic and historical inquiry into ancient Japanese kinship organization, which highlights bilineal descent, uncovered the existence and importance of duolocal (wife-visiting) and uxorilocal (matrilocal) marriage, female inheritance of houses and property, and communal child rearing on the mother's side. The whole system spared women from being reduced to performing domestic duties (motherhood and housekeeping), a ubiquitous problem in institutionalized forms of marriage. It is to this system of duolocal and matrilocal residence that Takamure attributes women's relatively high status in ancient Japanese society as well as their preeminent position in classical Japanese literature.

Takamure's analysis of duolocal and uxorilocal marriages is guided primarily by the term *tsumadoi* (妻問, the husband's visits to his wife's home) observable in Nara texts (710-94 CE) and by the term *mukotori* (婿取, the adoption of a man into his wife's family) that frequently appears in various Heian (794-1185 CE) texts.[4] During the period of kin-based communities, husband and wife had separate residences and married duolocally, and were full members of their respective clans. Marriage was thus a visiting relationship in which the husband commuted to his wife's house, while his own clan ensured his livelihood and persisted as his domestic and family base. In the mid-Heian period, however, increased agricultural productivity under the *shōen* (private proprietorship) system enticed maternal families to improve their economic prospects by contracting marriages.[5] Non-aristocratic men left their natal homes, lived with their wives, and performed labor for their in-laws.

In the Muromachi period (1392-1573 CE), there was a fundamental shift from the 'taking of a son-in-law' (*mukotori*; matrilocal/uxorilocal residence) to the 'entering of a daughter-in-law' (*yomeiri*; patrilocal/virilocal residence). As urban and commercial life undermined and overthrew the traditional kin-based communal order, wives became bound to their husbands' households. Takamure thus connects the historical emergence of full-fledged patriarchy to a shift of attitudes and practices that saw men treating women like commodities in the profit-driven economy. While documenting the existence of women voluntarily offering themselves for sex from Nara times onward, she analyzes the rapidly expanding market economy—the driving force behind the proliferation of commercialized sex—as the ultimate cause of women's subordination.[6]

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4 See *Shōsei kon no kenkyū I*, in *TIz*, 2:28-29, 71-72; *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:64, 206.
5 See *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:81-82.
6 Takamure provides detailed accounts of female sexual entertainers (such as *yūkō jofu*, *asobime*, *kugutsu*, and *shirabyōshi*) who engaged with the shamanic tradition, along with women in wealthy households who offered sexual services to traveling noblemen or samurai warriors, in the pre-Muromachi periods. She interprets both cases as degraded forms of *otori* ('taking of a man'), seduction of a man by a woman. See *Shōsei kon no kenkyū I*, in *TIz*, 2:346-48, 618-30; *Shōsei kon no kenkyū II*, in *TIz*, 3:883-90; *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:158-60.

Takamure published a six-volume series of Japanese women's history—*Bokei sei no kenkyū* (A Study of the Matrilineal System, 1938), *Shōsei kon no kenkyū* (A Study of Uxorilocal Marriage, 1953) in two volumes, and *Josei no rekishi* (A History of Women) in three volumes—ancient, feudal, and modern—which were respectively published in 1954, 1955, and 1958. These books deal with three central aspects of her historiographical enquiries: 1) the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal forms of kinship in the pre-Heian periods; 2) duolocal and matrilocal marriage customs in ancient and early medieval times; and 3) the changing position of women in Japan in a world-historical context.[7]

Many scholars are of the opinion that Japan's antiquity was a bilateral society,[8] and Takamure, too, makes bilineality her major focus, despite all her emphasis on presumed matrilineal descent. I contend, in any case, that the real question for her is not whether ancient Japanese society was purely matrilineal, but whether it was matricultural. Takamure discovered that the official records—with descent in the male line—were politically manipulated under Chinese influence and almost entirely divorced from reality, and that the material base for female-centeredness remained unchanged for centuries. Takamure's central interest thus lay in matrifocal practices, which sustained the high status of women and allowed them to unleash their brilliance like the sun. The sun thus provides Takamure with a framing device. She highlights its splendor at the beginning and end of *Josei no rekishi*, in which she offers a comprehensive view of history that looks for a better future.

**Matriculture as a Paradigmatic Model for Constructing a New Culture**

At the age of twenty-five, Hiratsuka wrote 'In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun' ([*Genshi josei wa taiyō de atta* 1911 ‡]) for the founding issue of *Seitō* [The Bluestockings, 1911-16], Japan's first all-women literary journal. This poetical essay was a trailblazing manifesto calling for women's self-awakening and inner transformation. Hiratsuka proclaimed: 'In the beginning, woman was truly the sun, an authentic person. Now she is the moon, a wan and sickly moon, dependent on another,

7 Takamure's classification of marriage patterns in Japan is: group marriage (from consanguineal to affinal marriage in the non-pottery, Jōmon [ca. 10,500-300 B.C.E.], and Yayoi [300 B.C.E.-250 C.E.] periods); pairing marriage with remnants of group marriage—polygyny and polyandry (visiting marriage in the Yamato/Kofun period [ca. 250-538], pre-uxorilocal marriage in the Asuka [538-710], Nara [710-794], and early Heian [794-1185] periods, pure uxorilocal marriage in the mid-Heian period, managerial uxorilocal marriage in the late Heian period, and pseudo-uxorilocal marriage in the Kamakura [1185-1336] and Nanbokuchō [1336-1392] periods); virilocal marriage (patriarchal monogamy in the Muromachi [1392-1573], Azuchi-Momoyama [1573-1603], and Tokugawa [1603-1868] periods); companionate marriage (pure monogamy in the Meiji [1868-1912], Taishō [1912-1926], and Shōwa [1926-1989] periods). See *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:12-13.

8 For an analysis of the development of bilateral descent theories in the study of ancient Japan, see Kurihara Hiromu, *Takamure Itsue no kon'in joseishi zō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Takashina Shoten, 1994), 150-55. According to this source, the two most important works in this effort are Yoshida Takashi's *Ritsuryō kokka to kodai no shakai* [The Ritsuryō State and Ancient Society, 1983] and Akashi Kazunori's *Nihon kodai no shinzoku kōzō* [Kinship Structures in Ancient Japan, 1990]. Kurihara also refers to Yoshie Akiko's *Nihon kodai no uji no kōzō* [Clan Structures in Ancient Japan, 1986] and Sumi Tōyō's *Zenkindai Nihon kazoku no kōzō* [Family Structures in Premodern Japan, 1983]. Sumi interprets Heian marriage practices in light of the bilateral kinship systems of Southeast Asia. Kurihara explains bilateral kinship in terms of the absence of clear marriage residence rules.

reflecting another's brilliance. The time has come for us to recapture the sun hidden within us.'[9] Takamure hailed the explosive outburst of vitality in Hiratsuka's poetic language, and regarded her as a 'prophet and forerunner.'[10] Takamure saw the crucial importance of Hiratsuka's equation of 'the sun hidden within us' with 'the genius dormant within us'[11]—her exhortation that women restore their hidden sun and free their inner genius.

For Hiratsuka, one of the major participants in the "motherhood protection debate" of 1916-19 in Japan, the crux of women's issues lay in their special role as mothers. She was a staunch critic of liberal and socialist feminists who relegated the special needs of motherhood to the margins of women's struggles. Hiratsuka's revolutionary maternalism held that pregnancy and childcare belonged to the public realm, not on account of state-determined norms or nationalist goals, but on the grounds that mothers were contributors to society and humanity.[12] Like Hiratsuka, Takamure placed motherhood at the centre of the woman question. For Takamure, 'issues other than motherhood do not deserve to be called 'women's' issues because they are gender-neutral issues, such as human rights, labor, and agriculture.'[13] Takamure was openly skeptical of liberal individualism because it trivialized maternal values, downplayed biological femaleness, and favored gender-neutral approaches. Instead of resorting to micro-political strategies, such as resistance via deconstruction, she sought to end patriarchal oppression by offering a strikingly new matricentric view of the world. Departing from traditional sacrificial motherhood, she posited communal mothering as the ultimate source of empowerment for women.

Pursuing maternalistic values entails a refashioning of the world—locally, nationally, and internationally. Takamure's ultimate concern was with the creation of a wholly new culture. Bringing fundamental changes to a society that devalues motherhood requires no less than drastic cultural restructuring. In 'Standing on the Women's Front' [*Fujin sensen ni tatsu*, 1930], Takamure advocated for 'new cultural construction' for the sake of remaking society.'[14] This anarcho-feminist manifesto echoed another work by Hiratsuka, 'Women's Mission for Social Reconstruction' [*Shakai kaizō ni taisuru fujin no shimei*, 1920], in which she proposed that a fundamental 'reconfiguration of society' promoting love, marriage, procreation, childrearing and education should be the prime objective of the most progressive women's movement.[15] Taking Hiratsuka's vision a step further and redefining maternal thinking and feminist mothering in her anarchist philosophy, Takamure embarked on a series of historiographical research projects and discovered a mother-friendly society in Japanese antiquity.

Enquiring into matrifocality in Japan, Takamure drew on the works of anthropologists who had conducted research on matrilineal societies, among whom were Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942),

9 Hiratsuka Raichō, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, Weatherhead Books on Asia, trans. Teruko Craig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 158.
10 *Josei no rekishi II*, in *TIz*, 5:724.
11 Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun*, 158.
12 See *Josei no rekishi II*, in *TIz*, 5:732-38.
13 Takamure Itsue, "Nihon ni tatsu," *Fujo shinbun*, January 1, 1932, 7 (7).
14 Takamure Itsue, "Fujin sensen ni tatsu," in *Waga michi wa tsuneni fubukeri: jūgo nen sensō zenya*, ed. Nagahata Michiko (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 1995), 38, 49-50.
15 See Hiratsuka Raichō. "Shakai kaizō ni taisuru fujin no shimei—*Josei dōmei* sōkan no ji ni kaete—," in *Hiratsuka Raichō hyōron shū*, eds. Kobayashi Tomie and Yoneda Sayoko (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987), 157, 163.

John Ferguson McLennan (1827-81) and Robert Stephen Briffault (1876-1948). Takamure weaves anthropological studies into her narratives of ancient Japanese marriage patterns, pointing to many parallels between Japan and other cultures on the margins of civilization with radically different gender organisations. She takes an interest in the matrilineal Amis (Pangcah) tribe, an indigenous group in Taiwan, referencing Okada Yuzuru's (1906-69) *Mikai shakai ni okeru kazoku* [*The Family in Primitive Societies*, 1942]. She also expresses interest in the uxorilocal mode of living of the Minangkabau people,[16] and is familiar with the Garo (although not with the Khasi) through Gabrielle Bertrand's chronicle of her expedition to the Northeast Indian state of Assam, *Secret Lands Where Women Reign* (1956).[17]

Takamure marvels at the Iroquois Confederacy, a confederation of five (later six) Native American tribes in the central region of New York State that inspired Benjamin Franklin (1706-90 CE), one of America's founders, to envision the United States as a league of equal states cooperating for their common welfare. Guided by American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan's (1818-81 CE) *Ancient Society* (1877), she extols the benefits of a self-governing system that organises human societies into a coalition of multiple autonomous communities. Pointing out the advantages of Iroquois society, she writes: 'Despite being simple and rudimentary, this system was remarkable in that order was maintained without the military or police, kings or aristocrats, courts or prisons; there were no poor people or slaves in this communal society.'[18] From Takamure's standpoint, as I will discuss later, the matrilineal Iroquois, along with the ancient Japanese, offer two primary models for reshaping society. Coincidentally, Shinto, the traditional animistic belief system of Japan, is strikingly similar to Native American religion.

**The Ancestral Sun Goddess Amaterasu and Ancient Japanese Women's Literature**

'In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun' is a reference to the supremacy of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu—the Queen of the Heavens and the mother of all—in Japan's pantheon of deities. Takamure wonders why the sun is feminine in Japanese culture, while it is masculine in many other cultures, as in the case of Apollo in Greek mythology.[19] She suggests that the gender of the sun deity in all cultures was originally feminine and was later altered to masculine. She bases her argument on the fact that in Japan, at the height of patrilineal-patriarchal practices from the Muromachi to Tokugawa (1603-1868) periods, there emerged movements to change the gender of Amaterasu to neuter or masculine. In *When God Was a Woman* (1976), Merlin Stone shows a precedent when she writes that Muhammad (570-632 CE), the prophet and founder of Islam, 'brought an end to the national worship of the Sun Goddess, Al Lat' in seventh-century Arabia.[20]

16 *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:48; *Josei shi kenkyū no tachiba kara*, in *TIz*, 7:228-29.
17 See *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:35, 65.
18 Takamure, "Fujin sensen ni tatsu," 45.
19 *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:9-10.
20 Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976), 195. Stone identifies accounts of sun goddesses in Canaan, Anatolia, Arabia, and Australia and among the Eskimos, the Japanese, and the Khasis of India. See Ibid., 2-3.

Equating the cosmic dimensions of feminine power with the glory of sunlight, Hiratsuka's aforementioned manifesto inspires Takamure to explore women's ritual activities pertaining to Amaterasu during the early period of Japan.[21] Tapping into the ancient tradition of oral storytelling, Takamure calls attention to the female ritual narrators (*kataribe*) of the Nara and pre-Nara periods who participated in recounting celebrated mythological and historical events from the ancient Japanese past. Foremost among these ceremonial oral reciters was Hieda no Are, a court attendant. Are played a pivotal role in compiling the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712), Japan's earliest extant history, and in transmitting wondrous stories of Japan's ancient mythopoetic universe. Takamure takes special note of ancient Japanese women's speech because women played a salient role in invoking the power of *kotodama*, the spiritual power residing in words. Embodying the plenitude of living speech, they played a prominent part in the development of Japan into the 'land blessed with word-spirits'.

Takamure is utterly fascinated with women's role in oral traditions because it points to their significant contribution to linguistic vitality in the communal relations of early Japanese society. She explains *kataribe* primarily as a 'guild in each clan whose task was to orally pass down its genealogical and anecdotal stories by performing *katari mono* (things to narrate) with beautifully chosen words and musical sounds'.[22] Holding the *Kojiki* to be of great inspirational value, Takamure observes that the narration of past events energized and uplifted the collective spirit of its listeners by means of clan rites. She illustrates this point by referring to the story of Karanu, a ship that sailed at amazing speed. It was made from a towering tree that had cast its magnificent shadow over a remote island (Awaji Island) in the morning sun and over a distant mountain (Mount Takayasu) in the evening sun. When the vessel was decayed and burnt for salt, leftover parts were made into a cittern, 'the sound of which reverberated for seven leagues'.[23] Takamure presumes that this legendary account was transmitted by *kataribe* reciters in the Tonoki clan in Tonoki (富木, "Bountiful Tree") village in Izumi Province (present-day Osaka Prefecture) for the establishment of a sacred regional order, because the Tonoki Shrine was their tutelary shrine.

Besides the *Kojiki*, the *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves, c. 760), the oldest extant anthology of Japanese poetry, is a celebrated example of *makoto*—words spoken with the utmost truthfulness and sincerity. Takamure claims that duolocal marriage (in which the husband visited the wife solely for love) formed the background for the marvelous heights of commoners' poetic sensibilities and allowed women to achieve both sexual and economic independence.[24] She also finds in poems composed by anonymous authors a source of inspiration to call for the 'resurrection of chastity.'[25] She understands chastity as an innate longing for bodily and spiritual integrity. Drawing examples from the *Man'yōshū*, she observes that, during the period of duolocal residence, chaste love restrained promiscuity and allowed for the regulation, control and management of sexuality in place of the institution of marriage. She defines chastity as the dictates of conscience in the feeling of love, a conscience that keeps women and men from yielding to authority or coercion. *Man'yō* verses were

21 See *Josei no rekishi II*, in *TIz*, 5:723.
22 See *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:125-26.
23 *Kojiki*, trans. Donald L. Philippi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 322.
24 See *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:43-44.
25 See *Ren'ai ron*, in *TIz*, 6:425-37.

composed for nearly one and a half centuries until the mid-Nara period,marking a time when mutual attraction between the sexes figured purely as love, free from the contractual fetters of marriage and domesticity.[26]

Takamure established a direct connection between poetic lyricism and the lack of formal marriage rules and procedures. Evidently, not all historians agreed with her perspective. For example, Wakita Haruko, a historian of medieval Japan and a steadfast believer in the institution of monogamous marriage, berated Takamure for finding positive value in freely chosen and potentially unstable conjugal relationships.[27] Wakita had a deep antipathy toward polygamy but, interestingly, the same is true of Takamure. Takamure detested polygamous practices and expressed a strong partiality for monogamy. But Takamure extolled conjugal relations sustained by the power of language—the kind of linguistic prowess manifested in the *Man'yōshū*, the most highly revered collection of Japanese poetry —rather than by the financial benefits of institutional marriage. In the *Man'yō* era, when marriage was not yet an economic institution, marriage partners relied on linguistic exchanges rather than formal ties. Understanding great poets as those who are capable of great love, Takamure has no difficulty in drawing a dramatic and immediate link between the practice of duolocal marriage and the flowering of lyrical poetry.

Takamure expresses marked ambivalence about the accomplishments of women writers during the Heian period, because they were the product of the gradual transition from matricultural to patricultural systems, an era of high aristocratic culture. Although Heian society was matrilocal, women aristocrats became increasingly objectified and vulnerable as their male clan members capitalized on marriage ties to achieve political influence and power. William H. McCullough agrees with Takamure that there was an 'almost total absence of virilocal marriages' among Heian aristocrats, and that patterns of marital residence were invariably uxorilocal, duolocal, or neolocal.[28] These residential arrangements, however, may not necessarily be taken as evidence of women's higher status. Wakita argues that Heian uxorilocal marriage should not be confused with female dominance because the taking of a son-in-law was in fact dictated by a bride's father.[29] Indeed, according to Peter Nickerson, the curious mixture of patriliny and uxorilocality characteristic of mid-Heian institutions was a result of elaborate 'alliance-games' between wife-takers and wife-givers.[30]

Under the corrupting influence of power and wealth, Heian men developed a pronounced tendency for rampant promiscuity. As the pleasures of the flesh came to replace spiritually exalted love, married lives became subject to men's arbitrary whims. According to Watika, Heian duolocal marriage caused

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26 See *Shōsei kon no kenkyū I*, in *TIz*, 2:44.

27 See Wakita Haruko, *Chūsei ni ikiru onna tachi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 23-25. According to Suzanne Gay, Wakita "casts doubt on the theory that patriarchal societies are uniformly harmful to women's interests." Wakita Haruko and Suzanne Gay, "Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan from the Perspective of Women's History," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 73.

28 William H. McCullough, "Japanese Marriage Institutions in the Heian Period," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 27 (1967): 106.

29 Wakita and Gay, 83. In Heian aristocratic society, "men of good lineage and ability" like Fujiwara no Kaneie were greatly favored as sons-in-laws by women's families who sought economic prosperity and security. Ibid., 85.

30 Peter Nickerson, "The Meaning of Matrilocality. Kinship, Property, and Politics in Mid-Heian," *Monumenta Nipponica* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 445-46.

tremendous emotional distress to women, because 'this form of marriage…allowed one man to have many wives, or, more properly speaking, allowed one man to have multiple wives and multiple concubines.'[31] Against this backdrop, as Takamure observes, Heian women strenuously resisted the downgrading of their status through a powerful outpouring of literary achievements with an originality and intensity unequaled by any Japanese writers of later ages.

This literary output includes the world's first psychological novel. Written by the court lady Murasaki Shikibu, the monumental *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji , ca. 1010-14 CE) epitomises its author's phenomenal ability to grasp the full complexity of human existence. Written with superb narrative vitality, this Heian classic thoroughly impressed Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801 CE), the foremost Tokugawa scholar of National Learning, who wrote that the tale delineates the most profound human emotions in exhaustive detail. Indeed, Murasaki Shikibu succeeded in bringing an astonishing complex of subtle emotions and intricate human relations into a harmonious whole. For Takamure, Lady Murasaki reached deeply into each single character, showing a thorough knowledge of the human psyche. For Takamure, the staggering array of characters in *Genji monogatari* represents a warm affirmation of all human existence.[32] Takamure sees in Lady Murasaki's portrayal of both female and male characters not only extraordinary empathy but a profound understanding of life.

Takamure regards the whole breadth of Heian women's literary production—poetry, poetic diaries, fictional tales, and essays—as a resistance to men.[33] Positioning women's literary pursuits as acts of 'final resistance,' she compares Lady Murasaki's 'resistance literature' to 'the light of the sunset's afterglow that crimsons the evening sky in late fall.'[34] For Takamure, the confessional literature of Heian Japan articulated the 'resistance of the sun.' In her mind, the explosive nature of Heian women's individual creativity was the ultimate consequence of the deep introspection that grew out of their all-consuming desperation and sorrow. In a manner akin to maternal sensitivity and insightfulness, their unclouded vision transmuted the domain of subjectivity into a considerable degree of objectivity, retaining the pantheistic atmosphere emanating from communal consciousness. While reflecting on the grandeur of their literary realism, Takamure laments: 'The lives of women in our country have never again risen to such stunning heights.'[35]

**Matricultural Aspects of Ancient Japan**

Takamure understood 'women's culture' as an inclusive and communal realm engendering a sense of common humanity. She contrasts women's culture with exclusive and hierarchical 'men's culture,' which sets up class divisions for exploitation and oppression. Seeing the essence of matrilineal kinship in peaceful coexistence, Takamure has no interest in female supremacy or in a reversal of the power relationship between men and women. She thus rarely uses the term 'matriarchy' [rule by women], a mirror opposite of patriarchy. Takamure's position is that patriarchal norms are detrimental to both

31 Wakita and Gay, 84.
32 See *Josei no rekishi*, in *TIz*, 4:234-35.
33 See Ibid., 4:228-29.
34 Ibid., 4:234.
35 Ibid., 4:238.

sexes. For Takamure, female culture implies a society based on the love of others. She speaks of the early Japanese (prior to the rise of the Heian aristocracy) as ‘agriculturists, pacifists, and pantheists' who contemplated the spiritual power of nature with reverent wonder and had genuine respect for women.[36]

This bears a remarkable resemblance to the findings of Peggy Reeves Sanday in her ethnographic study of the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, the world’s largest matrilineal society today. In *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* (2002), Sanday focuses on the Minangkabau’s nature-centered worldview and claims that 'maternal nurture constitutes the wellspring of social power.'[37] Reflecting on the supremacy of nurture (not dominion) in Minangkabau village society, Sanday explores an alternative to the modern Western notion of power, entrenched in rivalry and contestation in civil society. In place of such a zero-sum approach to power, she redefines power in terms of the regeneration of life on the model of fertility and growth in the world of nature.

In defiance of the valorization of the individual self in the modern West, Takamure invokes the notion of maternal love (*haha gokoro*). She searches for a fundamental paradigm shift away from the sovereignty of selfhood to the spirit of love. This paradigm shift entails embracing others and the larger world as 'part of one’s own self.'[38] Hence maternal love is not simply the love of the mother but essentially the love of life itself. It is a higher consciousness of love that belongs fully to the realm of 'godly love'.[39] Takamure looks on maternal warmth and tenderness as the quintessence of women’s brilliance in ancient Japanese culture. Maternal love is the highest form of women’s grace and charm known to her. Without hesitation, she elevates maternal empathy into a timeless, universal model.

Takamure is committed to the primacy of love because she sees in it the potential to fully develop individual intellectual and emotional capabilities. She explains maternal compassion as 'an affectionate, insightful way of looking at things.'[40] She reaches for examples in literary depictions of children and small things, such as Lady Murasaki’s portrayal of the young Murasaki (no Ue), Prince Genji’s most beloved lady, and Sei Shōnagon’s fascination with noisy, lovely chicks in *Makura no sōshi* (The Pillow Book, ca. 1002). A specifically maternal aura surrounding Heian women’s texts compels Takamure to write: 'The capacity to love so deeply is a form of great ability or intelligence.'[41] The affirmation of all living things bears witness to women’s capacity for love in ancient Japanese history. The love of life on a cosmic scale is precisely what Takamure sees as missing from modern liberal thinking.

Takamure reflects on ancient Japanese women’s voluntary efforts to elevate the hearts and minds of people in domestic and public life.[42] In ancient Japan, the spirit of communal existence—the very core

36 Ibid., 4:123.
37 Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 46.
38 Takamure Itsue, “Chisei,” *Nihon fujin* (December 1944): 19.
39 Takamure Itsue, “Kami gokoro,” *Nihon fujin* (August 1944): 9, 11.
40 Takamure, “Chisei,” 18.
41 Ibid.
42 See Takamure Itsue, “Shimei kan,” *Nihon fujin* (September 1944): 18.

of powerfully maternal consciousness—was most clearly manifested in the performance of religious functions by women. Most important of all were those related to the legend of Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, an ancient goddess of mirth. She became divinely possessed and wrestled with the greatest crisis imaginable, namely, Amaterasu's concealment in the Heavenly Rock Cave, which plunged the world into darkness and led to a never ending night and all sorts of misfortunes.[43] The Sun Goddess refused to come out of the cave out of exasperation with the sinfulness of the world embodied by her unruly brother Susanoo. In this dreadful situation, Uzume deliberately chose to sing and dance half-naked at the door of the cave with her breasts exposed and her skirt-band pushed down to her genitals. The eight hundred myriad gods roared with laughter. Amaterasu could not resist the urge to know what made them rejoice so merrily. When she opened the door, she was tricked by a mirror and pulled out of the cave. While finding humor in the exotic Uzume's attire and performance, Takamure is awed by the efficacy of her wholehearted prayer, which moved both gods and humans and ultimately solved the crisis.[44] Takamure describes Uzume as epitomising women's power to combat evil and chaos and to restore peace and order to the world.

Takamure attaches special significance to an ancient ritual prayer (*norito*) called the *Ō-harae* (Great Purification). *Harae* was the ceremony of cleansing the mind and the body to bring about new beginnings. The Great Purification concerned four female deities of the rivers and oceans who undertook the arduous task of removing human sins from the entire realm. Takamure writes: "In river rapids and ocean currents, in the middle or at the bottom, the goddesses are endeavoring to atone for offenses emanating from humans."[45] The spiritual power of women was believed to have such purifying effects. By extension, in Takamure's perspective, maternal love has the vitality needed to resolve conflicts and to replace brutal power struggles with peaceful and harmonious relationships.

The mythic narratives of early Japan, full of maternal imagery, formed the foundation for Shinto rituals. In *Matriarchal Societies* (2012), a study of female-centered cultures around the world, Heide Goettner-Abendroth identifies the ancient Shinto faith as a matriarchal mythology.[46] Takamure was fascinated by Shinto because she was drawn to the purely religious, the power capable of ennobling the human soul. Since the Shinto pantheon is made up of eight hundred myriad deities (*yaoyorozu no kami*), Shinto (the Way of the Gods) is religiously eclectic and can accommodate an infinite variety of religious faiths–so long as faith penetrates to the heart of the divine. Symbolically, 'eight million' (*yaoyorozu*), the number deemed uncountable in the Shinto religion, encompassed all supreme beings. Indeed, religious inclusiveness was entirely compatible with the all-encompassing nature of maternal sensibility in the ancient Japanese past.

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43 See *Kojiki*, 81-84.
44 See Takamure, "Shimei kan," 18-19.
45 These goddesses were Se-ori-tu-hime, Haya-aki-tu-hime, Ibuki-do-nusi, and Haya-sasura-hime. See Takamure, "Shimei kan," 21. In Donald L. Philippi's translation, Ibuki-do-nushi is identified as male, but Takamure specifies that the gender of this deity is female. See *Norito: A Translation of the Ancient Japanese Ritual Prayers*, trans. Donald L. Philippi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 48.
46 See Heide Goettner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Cultures Across the Globe*, trans. Karen Smith (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 149-52.

**The Sociopolitical Conditions Attending Matrilineal-Matrilocal Ties**

Coining the term *hime-hiko sei* [queen-king co-ruling], Takamure brings attention to a political system of collaboration between men and women during Japanese antiquity.[47] Essentially, the system fostered the high status of women in the brother-sister rule of clan societies in the pre-*ritsuryō* era—before Japan adopted Chinese-style administrative structures and legal codes. Takamure specifies that, in principle, a pair styled as co-rulers was not a couple. She places the 'queen-king co-ruling' paradigm at the center of the early Japanese Yamato court by referring to the Izanagi-Izanami myth ('He Who Invites' and 'She Who Invites') as well as the coupling of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami ('Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven') with her brother the Moon God Tsukuyomi ('Moon Counting/Reading').[48] Besides invoking such mythical entities, Takamure observes that numerous examples of paired names are detectable in the *Kojiki*, *Fudoki (*Topographical Records, commissioned in 713 CE) and the *Nihon shoki (*Chronicles of Japan, 720 CE), among other ancient genealogies and records.[49] In light of this, she describes country chieftains (*kuni-no-miyatsuko)*, the governors of provinces (*kuni)*, as paired chieftains.[50] Such gender-complementary chieftain pairs allowed for the emergence of women rulers who devoted themselves to divine services and made administrative decisions.

One such woman ruler was Himiko (August Child of the Sun), the charismatic queen-shaman whom Takamure views as the country's ancestral mother (*zokubo)*.[51] Himiko was only fourteen or fifteen years old when she took the throne. She was a celibate queen who secluded herself for the rest of her life in order to strengthen her magico-religious powers.[52] After her enthronement, only her younger brother ever attended to her, serving her meals and transmitting her words, as he alone had access to her living quarters. This ensured that her commitment to the shamanic theocracy was uninterrupted. According to 'Woren *zhuan*' (Entry on the Wa People) in the third-century Chinese chronicle *Wei zhi* (Records of Wei), Himiko resided in the kingdom of Yamatai, a land which the Chinese derogatorily

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47 See Joan R. Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 39. If the consolidation of Japanese kingship is the focus of our analysis, women's political contributions may appear to have been a preliminary stage. See Joan R. Piggott, "Chieftain Pairs and Corulers: Female Sovereignty in Early Japan," in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, eds. Anne Walthall, Hitomi Tonomura, and Wakita Haruko (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1999), 17-52.

48 See *Bokei sei no kenkyū*, in *TIz*, 1:361.

49 See *Bokei sei no kenkyū*, in *TIz*, 1:367; *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:110-11.

50 For a discussion of regional female chieftains in fourth- and fifth-century Japan, see Yoshie Akiko and Janet R. Goodwin, "Gender in Early Classical Japan: Marriage, Leadership, and Political Status in Village and Palace," *Monumenta Nipponica* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 462-65, 471. Yoshie Akiko interprets the widespread presence of female local chiefs as a precursor of the economic and administrative roles played by women known as *toji* in agricultural production and management in the eighth and ninth centuries.

51 See *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:74.

52 See Ibid., 4:78. This historical fact was of special significance for Takamure, because she went into seclusion in 1931 and devoted the rest of her life to the study of women's history. She inaugurated the field of feminist historiography in Japan like the ancient queen-shaman performing religious services with the assistance of her male partner. This unremitting labor would not have been possible without the wholehearted support of Takamure's husband, Hashimoto Kenzō (1897-1976). Since she worked for no less than ten hours per day, he dutifully performed household chores and looked after all aspects of her life. As she prohibited herself from going out, he collected all the materials she needed for her research.

named the land of Wa ('Dwarfs' or 'Small People'), from 180 to about 248 CE. The text also mentions that she performed the task of religio-political governance and 'had a special power that bewitched the people.'[53] Wei (220-266 CE), one of the major three states in the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 CE), thus scoffed at her manifest devotion to shamanistic practices. No matter what external views were, this shamanic queen gave peace and stability to the Yamatai confederation by rendering service to the deities.

Together with her brother, the Sun Queen ruled over more than thirty states, of which Yamatai was most powerful. Takamure makes significant connections between Queen Himiko's confederation and Iroquois polity, which emerged around 1400-50 CE. According to Takamure, the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy are comparable to the regional clans loosely held together under Yamato authority in the early Yamato period (250-710 CE). Thus, Takamure names this system the Yamato Confederacy, bringing it close to Iroquois political institutions.[54] She posits Himiko's reign as an early phase of the Yamato confederation. Himiko oversaw Yamatai, a loose confederation of a little more than thirty allied states in third-century Japan.

According to religious scholar Hori Ichirō, "Himiko was enthroned by her people at the apex of political and social crisis…in a transitional period of revolutionary political, economic, social, and cultural changes at the juncture of the Yayoi and Kofun periods."[55] William Wayne Harris, a historian of premodern Japan, likewise situates Himiko as a transitional figure between the Yayoi (300 BCE-250 CE) and Kofun (ca. 250-538 CE) eras.[56] From the late third to fifth centuries, monumental burial mounds in the round keyhole shape were constructed as ostentatious displays of the power held by the ruling authorities in Japan. Takamure interprets the advent of *kofun* (ancient megalithic tombs) as a sign that hegemonic power threatened to supersede the existing horizontal system based on motherly compassion.[57] During this time of trials, Himiko was put on the throne in the belief that her spiritual presence could produce stability and unity. The source of her unifying power was nothing other than the sacral functions that she performed as a shamanic priestess.

The decisive fact here is that both the Yamatai and the Iroquois' confederacies made strenuous efforts to end endemic warfare, to restore order, and to abandon strife and enmity for peace and tranquility. It is interesting to note that the Great Law of Peace, with which five Iroquois nations made peace, is semantically consonant with Yamato, which meant 'Great Peace,' and was one of the ancient names of Japan.

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53 Ichiro Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 188.
54 See *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:88-100.
55 Hori, 188, 191. According to the *Wei zhi* "*Woren zhuan*": "That state [Wo] was ruled by a king for 70 to 80 years. At that time, Wo was in a chaotic state as the result of which a great civil war broke out and for many years the lords of small manors attacked each other. Afterwards, the people of Wo elected a young girl as their queen who was then named Himiko." Ibid., 188; *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:76-77.
56 William Wayne Farris, *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures: Issues in the Historical Archaeology of Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 24, 42, 47, 48.
57 See *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:83.

After Himiko's death, a king occupied the throne only to throw his realm into disorder, as male chieftainship was violently resisted.[58] Hence Himiko's thirteen-year-old niece and sister-shaman Toyo (or Iyo) restored order and stability. After Toyo's rule, it became customary for male rulers to carry out the task of government while female rulers remained in the background. For Takamure, the subsequent alternation of male and female monarchs represented the last vestige of the *hime-hiko* (queen-king co-ruling) system. In her explanation, queens like Himiko played a central role in male-female rule until the mid-third century and kings, while substantially assisted by their wives, held political leadership roles in the Kofun period; this was followed by the alternation of male and female emperors in the seventh and eighth centuries.[59] From Suiko (r. 592-628 CE) to Shōtoku (r. 764-70 CE), half of the sixteen monarchs were female, with six women heading eight reigns. Takamure links this phenomenon directly to the tradition of dual-gender pairs of rulers that goes back to times immemorial.

Takamure's interest in paired rulership is extended to the Ryukyu Islands (today known as Okinawa), which had a tradition of rule by pairs of male-female chieftains until 1667.[60] Her principal sources were Sakima Kōei's (1893-1925 CE) *Nyonin seiji kō* (Reflections on Female Rulership, 1926) and Torigoe Kenzaburō's (1914-2007 CE) *Ryūkyū kodai shakai no kenkyū* (A Study of Ancient Ryukyu Society, 1944). In the Ryukyu Kingdom, which Takamure regards as a great confederacy, the political leader was the king. He oversaw the religiopolitical rule with his sister who acted as the chief priestess (*kikoe ōkimi*) in the town of Shuri, the capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom.[61] Through a reading of the *Omoro sōshi*, a collection of Ryukyuan songs comparable to the *Man'yōshū*, Takamure identifies the *kikoe ōkimi* as a worshipper of the sun. In villages, male clan chieftains called *aji* ruled with priestesses called *noro*. With reference to Iha Fuyū's (1876-1947 CE) *Ko Ryūkyū* (Old Ryukyu, 1911) and other writings on Okinawa, Takamure underscores the deification of women and the similarity between Ryukyu and ancient Japanese customs.

Takamure establishes that early kinship-based communal systems were essentially incompatible with centralized bureaucratic control, as social order and cohesion were based not on legal norms but on blood relations. In such self-sufficient communities, the system of consanguinity and affinity outweighed the use of police and military forces. The demise of this egalitarian order was largely the result of hostilities and intrigues in court politics. Takamure points out that the enhancement of productivity, the creation of agricultural surpluses, and the division between exploiters and the exploited spurred the rise of clan rivalries.[62] After violent conflicts among powerful clan leaders, the Soga ministerial house's hegemony contested Yamato authority and led to the assassination of Emperor Sushun (r. 587-92 CE).

58 See ibid.
59 See ibid., 4:100-17, 220-24.
60 Ibid., 4:101-11.
61 Ibid., 4:106.
62 See ibid., 4:210-13.

In Takamure's estimation, the reign of Empress Suiko marks the beginning of the Japanese state.[63] Of Soga lineage, Suiko came to the throne to fill the political vacuum left by the killing of Sushun while her nephew Shōtoku Taishi (574-622 CE) acted as regent. Prince Shōtoku sent the first official envoy to Sui China in 607, which was among the most drastic actions he took to unify Japan under imperial authority.[64] When this ardent reformer died, however, the Soga clan arrested his heir and destroyed his family altogether. In turn, Soga power was crushed through the successful coup staged by Prince Naka no Ōe (626-72 CE) in 645 CE.

The consolidation of the Japanese imperial state was brought about by the Taika (Great Change) Reform of 645 and the promulgation of the Taihō Code of 701, a sequence of epoch-making events that led to the introduction of the *ritsuryō* administrative system. The *ritsuryō* polity, which was modeled on the Chinese legislation of the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, placed all the land and people under the direct control of the central government. This was followed by the gradual disintegration of communities bound together by blood ties, resulting in a shift from the common clan ownership of property to the individual accumulation of private property. With this transformation of property systems began the decline in women's status. Yet, as Takamure observes, the *ritsuryō* government did not bring about sweeping social change across Japan.[65] In fact, there remained a considerable gap between *ritsuryō* legal codes and actual social conditions. Yoshie Akiko, a scholar of ancient Japanese history, argues that a residential unit called *ko*—artificially created for the purposes of taxation and conscription—was a fictional patrilineal structure.[66] In the *ritsuryō* era, marriages between free people and slaves, imperial family members and commoners, and high-ranking and low-ranking officials were officially prohibited but nonetheless did occur.[67] All of this led Takamure to conclude that matrilineal-matrilocal traditions were sufficiently embedded to cross over class lines and to work against social stratification.

Takamure argues for the resilience of the earlier magico-religious order and points out that it was not entirely destroyed under the new imperial system, for women continued to carry out religious duties at all levels of society.[68] She cites the Saiō of the Grand Shrine of Ise (Amaterasu's shrine), the Saiin of the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto, the Saijo of the Kasuga Shrine in Nara, and the Negi of the Yahata Shrine in Kobe. As Takamure notes, Princess Yamato-hime, a poet and the wife of Emperor Tenji (r. 661-72 CE), singled out Ise as a holy place that was best suited to enshrine the Yata no Kagami (Eight Span Mirror), while she was traveling with it.[69] Symbolic of the egalitarian spirit of the Sun Goddess, this sacred mirror was transmitted to her grandson, Ninigi, at the time of his descent to earth and established the political ethos through which the Yamato sovereign ruled Japan. This ancient bronze artifact, one of

63 See ibid., 4:220. Joan R. Piggott's work on early Japanese kingship from Himiko to Shōmu (r. 724-749) shows us how Suiko's Japan was "the womb of an early state formation" or "an inchoate early state," because Shōtoku, her regent, introduced a merit-based court ranking system that disrupted the hitherto dominant kinship-based political structures. See Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, 13, 100-1.
64 China was divided into the Three Kingdoms (Wei, Shu, and Wu) when Queen Himiko of Yamatai sent a diplomatic envoy to the Wei emperor in 238.
65 See *Nihon kon'in shi*, in *TIz*, 6:52-62.
66 See Yoshie and Goodwin, 438-42, 446-47.
67 See *Shōsei kon no kenkyū I*, in *TIz*, 2:297.
68 See *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:219.
69 See Takamure Itsue, "Saiō Yamato-hime no Mikoto," *Nihon fujin* (October 1943): 10-11.

the Three Sacred Treasures of the Japanese imperial family, was supposedly shaped in the form of a flower with eight petals—evocative of the radiance of the sun in all directions. The mirror was crafted to lure the sun deity out of the Rock Cave of Heaven when she concealed herself and engendered a dark world.

**Takamure as a Matricultural Visionary**

Immersing herself in the world of ancient Japan, Takamure aspires to become a prophet of the future. Indeed, her paradigms are both historical and futuristic. She is firmly convinced that humanity one day will create an entirely new system that is female-oriented, both in concrete and abstract forms.[70] She thus envisions a world order predicated on love and nurture.

In matricultural paradigms, Takamure finds a vision for the future. Consanguineous clans are oriented towards localized independence and communal support for motherhood and child rearing. Contrasting the clan system and the family system, she concludes that the former brings about decentralized rule, while the latter undermines local solidarities, underlies the system of private property, and operates as the foundation of state centralization.[71] Takamure outlines her vision of humanity's future as follows:

> In the ultimate future society, as the family system disappears, thousands of years of patrilineal private ownership will be completely replaced by a matrilineal system in which children are communally supported and protected. At that time, all adult men will become fathers in common, and all adult women will become mothers in common, with all members of society calling each other brother and sister. In such a society, the collectivization of the means of production and of access to resources will put an end to the long history of patrilineal kinship systems based on the institution of marriage as an economic unit of private ownership. At the same time, all women's problems will wither away.[72]

This is what Takamure learned from matricultural societies, societies free of the woman question. She concentrated her considerable energies on proving the existence of such cultural remnants in Japan's past, precisely because they bring forth the possibility of realizing similar societies in the future.

In support of global connectedness, Takamure postulates such new possibilities as 'global citizens' and 'global citizenship'.[73] This is a variation of 'the conversion of the whole world into one family,' her heart's ideal during World War II (1939-45). During the Asia-Pacific War (1931-45 CE), when the Japanese public was totally kept in the dark about Japanese atrocities, Takamure was supportive of the Japanese war against the Anglo-American countries, but she never argued for imperial

70 See *Mori no ie nikki VI*, in *TIz*, 9:483.
71 See *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:194-201.
72 *Josei no rekishi II*, in *TIz*, 5:652.
73 Ibid.,5:2, 1022-28.

aggrandizement or colonial expansion.[74] Far from being an ultranationalist, she even ran the risk of committing treason against her nation by publishing *A Study of the Matrilineal System* in 1938. This work went against the wartime Japanese polity, refuting the immutability of the Japanese patriarchal family system.

For Takamure, the war occasioned a historical questioning of colonial modernity. She also came to proclaim the cardinal importance of worshipping the sun, in which she had taken little interest before the war. While Japanese wartime ideologues made use of Amaterasu to aggrandize the Sun Line, an unbroken line of imperial succession, Takamure gave a dramatic twist to their jingoistic rhetoric and recast this deity as an awe-inspiring peacemaker with universal appeal. In her contemplation of the Yamato Confederacy, Takamure looked to the Sun Goddess as a contributing factor in pacifying warlike rebellious tribes, because the grandness of her authority had convinced them of the importance of transcending differences and of forging a greater union.[75] Inspired by the archaic coalition of clans that had served to maintain peace in Japan (and perhaps also by the Iroquois League), Takamure brought forth a vision of one world family as an alternative to a conflict-ridden world of nation-states that had arisen under Western hegemony. In light of the competitive, patriarchal, and hierarchical nature of nation-states, it seems evident that local communalism will thrive on global communalism. In the postwar era, therefore, Takamure looked for signs of greater global integration, including the Campaign for World Government and the World Federalist Movement.[76] She applauded Hiratsuka for participating in the move toward the establishment of a global federal system.[77]

Takamure's faith in maternal pacifism highlights the absurdity of maintaining national boundaries that escalate armament races and obstruct human development. She descries military and national security spending as insanely wasteful and as squandering the progress of civilization.[78] Indeed, in light of the realities of national and international politics, her endorsement of one world family appears logical and cost-effective rather than naive and utopian. After the Second World War, Takamure saw the cause of the wars of the previous decades as resulting from the intoxication of a philosophy that divides the world between *yūshō reppai* – the superior win, the inferior lose.[79] She offered a passionate plea for communal living as an antidote to the doctrine of the survival of the fittest.

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74 For a discussion of the controversies surrounding Takamure's wartime essays, see Yasuko Sato, "Takamure Itsue's Revolt against the West during the Asia-Pacific War: Japanese Antiquity and a Global Paradigm Shift," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 42 (2012): 31-61. The crux of my argument is that Takamure supported the war for Japan's victory over the West, and not for Japan's conquest of Asia. In 1932, she expressed shock and outrage at a report on the brutalities that Japanese settlers had committed in Manchuria, but there is not one shred of evidence that she approved of Japan's imperialist aggression. Nonetheless, numerous critics of her wartime support, including Nishikawa Yūko, Kanō Mikiyo, Yamashita Etsuko, and Sonya Ryang, conclude that her writings endorsed the Japanese colonial empire. This is perhaps because they have limited access to Takamure's wartime journal contributions. The monthly journal *Nihon fujin* (Japanese Women, 1942-45), for example, is available only at the Kokkai Toshokan (National Diet Library) and the Fusen Kaikan (Women's Suffrage Hall) in Tokyo. Photocopying the aging journal is prohibited, and its physical deterioration makes it irritatingly hard to read. I had the luck to obtain photocopies of all Takamure's articles in *Nihon fujin* from a friend who worked as a librarian at the National Diet Library.
75 Takamure, "Saiō Yamato-hime no Mikoto," 12.
76 *Josei no rekishi II*, in *TIz*, 5:1052.
77 Ibid., 5:747.
78 Ibid., 5:1023. See also Ibid., 5:1028.
79 Ibid., 5:1031.

Takamure advocates for a shift from a profit-oriented to a subsistence economy and for abandoning the competitive struggle for survival to embrace 'love that nurtures coexistence.'[80] In this context, she denounces the absurdity of the economic system under which enormous quantities of food are thrown away while countless numbers of people are left hungry. Such food waste may be right for those who support patriarchal capitalism, but it is nothing other than a dystopia from a perspective of love. Moreover, it has recently been reported that the decomposition of food waste in landfills causes methane emissions that are dozens of times more damaging to the environment than carbon dioxide emissions. From Takamure's point of view, the food waste problem shows that the prevailing economic system is delusional. Her vision for one world/one matrilineal family resonates with significant new paradigms such as the 'world house' (Martin Luther King, Jr.), 'planetary citizenship' (Hazel Henderson), 'Earth Community' (David C. Korten), 'Earth Democracy' (Vandana Shiva), and earth ethics.

For Takamure, Amaterasu, the supreme deity of the Shinto pantheon, epitomises universal love. Love, like the life-giving power of the sun, is indispensable to all human lives. The sun is at the center of the cosmos and belongs to no hierarchy. As the universal giver of life, the sun promotes our identification with all humanity. Takamure's revitalization of the motherly peace embodied in the Sun Goddess Amaterasu is inextricably linked to her call for women's awakening to worldwide love and peace and to a desire for the well-being of all human beings.[81]

Takamure characterized the early Japanese as 'scholarly cosmologists' in the sense that they interpreted the world on cosmological planes and felt deeply connected to both the physical and the spiritual universe.[82] She compared 'citizens of the universe' who cherish the oneness and divineness of all life to miners who indefatigably raise questions and dig deeply into the mysteries of the universe. When nuclear armaments threatened to destroy humanity in the early Cold War years (1945-91 CE), Takamure pondered the contributions of such scientific geniuses as Marie Curie (1867-1934 CE) and Lise Meitner (1878-1968 CE) in the field of radioactivity. In her mind, their keen insights and deep intuitions were aligned with the divine feminine, a tradition going back to the belief in *onarigami* ('divine manifestations' or 'female tutelary deities') in Ryukyuan culture.[83] She discusses how Ryukyu women in general were perceived as sister-deities, protective spiritual forces for their clans and communities. Taking such female attributes one step further, Takamure anticipated an era when women would use their mysterious powers in beneficent ways and discover for peaceful purposes new scientific principles greater than nuclear physics.

Takamure did not live to see much of the nuclear age, but she correctly predicted the immense magnitude of solar energy applications and demands in the future. She prophetically wrote that large-scale solar energy production would be one of the privileges of planetary citizens. The hydrogen bomb and the sun share the same principle of nuclear fusion, the reaction where four hydrogen atomic nuclei join to make helium. For Takamure, nuclear fusion represents not weapons of mass destruction

80 See Ibid., 5:1028, 1049.
81 Ibid., 5:1053-59.
82 Ibid., 5:1056-58.
83 *Josei no rekishi I*, in *TIz*, 4:119-21.

but the mother sun that serves as a benevolent, peaceful, and gigantic source of energy. Prodigiously wasteful of energy, the sun arouses her wonder. The quantity of heat that the earth receives in the daytime is more than ten million times as large as one hundred million kilocalories. This is the heat capacity gained through the burning of one hundred million tons of coal all at once. When Takamure arrived at such a scientific understanding, her cheeks flushed red, with the pupils of her eyes filled with shimmering fire.[84] Firing her imagination, creating solar power by converting sunlight into electricity was already an exhilarating prospect during her lifetime.

In all likelihood, Takamure would insist that now is the time to let peaceable women step into their inner goddesses, unleash exuberant creativity, and save mother earth from destruction. The fact that existing renewable energy technologies have environmental impacts can be an indication that patriarchal practices and attitudes (including mastery over nature) are still left unquestioned. Therefore, unless the cosmic feminine is translated into eco-spirituality, it may not be possible to develop new insights into the inner workings of the natural universe or to derive truly workable solutions. If the violation of nature is inseparable from the toxicity of prevailing patriarchal norms, it is imperative to pursue the life-affirming values inherent in matriculture. In an era of what we might call global self-destruction, the life-giving way of matriliny is thus urgently relevant.

A catastrophic crisis like global environmental change may remain unsolved if the mysticism of female principles is dismissed as spurious. The stupendous complexity of the earth's rapidly changing climate is elucidated in terms of 'hyperobjects' that "occupy a high-dimensional phase space that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human-scale basis."[85] A revival of the spiritual and magical traditions of matricultural communities, therefore, has a direct and immediate relevance to the present. As we saw earlier, Uzume and Himiko (Sun Child or Sun Daughter) are archetypal illustrations of females who exert themselves and overcome monstrous adversaries that are inaccessible to reason.

Takamure wrote that women were like the sun when they realized their self-worth in the form of love and peace. She sought to replace ever-unchanging patriarchy-induced impairments with matricultural principles. She extolled matrifocal institutions as guardians of feminine values: of nurturance, care, and community. While the patriarchal order is dualistic, hierarchical, and authoritarian, matriliny functions as a unifying force in the service of life. For Takamure, human flourishing is grounded in the empowered mother. In societies where maternal power flourishes, both men and women are like the sun, full of light and life. The world should awaken to the importance of matricultural systems.

**Author Biography**

**Yasuko Sato** is an Associate Professor of History at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX, where she teaches East Asian history courses and U.S. history surveys. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. Her main areas of interests are Japanese intellectual history and feminist thought in global

84 See Ishimure Michiko, *Saigo no hito: shijin Takamure Itsue* (Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2012), 131-32.
85 "Climate Change is Too Big for our Brains feat. Mike Rugnetta," *Hot Mess*, accessed September 30, 2020, https://www.pbs.org/video/climate-change-is-too-big-for-our-brains-feat-mike-rugnetta-nc26o0/.

contexts, matricultures, environmental ethics, and the relevance of classical antiquity to the modern world. Her manuscript, *A Woman from the Land of Fire: Takamure Itsue and Japanese Antiquity*, has been accepted into the Studies of the Weatherhead East Asia Institution publication series at Columbia University. Her publications include 'Takamure Itsue's Revolt against the West during the Asia-Pacific War: Japanese Antiquity and a Global Paradigm Shift' in *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* (2012) and 'Matrilineal-Matrilocal Arrangements May End Trafficking in Women and Children' in *The Global Status of Women and Girls: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Lexington Books, 2017).

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# Indigenous Beliefs for Sustainability: On the Significance of Ritual in the Gender Ecology of Tibetan and Mosuo Matricultures of Northwestern Yunnan

**TOMMASO PREVIATO, PhD**

**Abstract**

*The present study explores the intersection of Indigenous beliefs and (eco)sustainability from a gender perspective. Overviewing China's development agenda and strategic environmental assessments in minority areas, it probes into the ritual economy of two matricultural systems in the southwestern province of Yunnan: Deqin (Diqing) and Yongning (Ninglang). In these places, women's engagement in community matters, responsible management of resources, and the ritual exchange between humans and the cognized world of territorial gods and elemental spirits of nature entwine with one another. Special attention is given to the knowledge of mountain forest ecosystems retained by Khamba Tibetan, Mosuo and Naxi people, as well as to the extent to which kin-based arrangements, matricultural concerns, religious norms and taboos motivate economic choices.*

**Keywords**

Indigenous beliefs, sustainability, gender ecology, Chinese minorities, ritual economy

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*Dans cette étude, l'auteur explore l'intersection des croyances autochtones et de (l'éco)durabilité dans une perspective de genre. À partir d'une vue d'ensemble du programme de développement de la Chine et des évaluations environnementales stratégiques dans les zones minoritaires, l'auteur explore l'économie rituelle de deux communautés ethniques du sud-ouest de la province du Yunnan: Deqin (Diqing) et Yongning (Ninglang). Dans ces communautés, l'engagement des femmes dans les questions communautaires, la planification, et la gestion des ressources s'entrelacent avec le système d'échange rituel entre les humains et le monde conceptualisé des dieux territoriaux et esprits élémentaux de la nature. L'auteur se penche sur la connaissance des écosystèmes forestiers montagneux des Khamba Tibétains, des Mosuo et des Naxi, ainsi que sur le degré auquel les demandes des relations parentales, les normes religieuses et les tabous rituels motivent les choix économiques.*

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**Mots-clés**
Croyances autochtones, durabilité, écologie de genre, minorités chinoises, économie rituelle

## INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, there has been considerable debate over the intricacies of gender inequality, which continues to persist broadly around the world in both traditional and industrial societies despite assiduous efforts and pledges to reduce it. Particularly in the former case, scholarship has shown that a significant structural change in rural hill economies can have enduring effects on gender relations, livelihood choices, and household organization, varying from the consolidation of age-old social divisions of labour to the adoption of new, and inequitable, methods of resource allocation.[1] The equation holding in these settings is that the more restrictive the society toward women, the greater the degree of environmental degradation.[2] Nonetheless, the effect that cultures with a strong matricultural system have on the way humans exploit natural resources and interact with the biotic and abiotic environment remains under-researched.[3] Not only is women's knowledge of the environment in relatively equal or less gender-restrictive societies most often overlooked,[4] but the postulate that the religious beliefs, rituals, and practices found in extant matricultures might represent an invaluable source of knowledge to be used for sustainable development has yet to germinate into a scientifically testable hypothesis.[5]

This paper seeks to initiate a discussion around such hypotheses and interrogate what place, if any, Indigenous women and matricultural concerns should occupy in the rapidly changing Chinese environmental governance and national development. In this article, I draw on examples showing how resource-dependent communities from the Himalayan foothills of northwestern Yunnan conceptualize, forge, and recalibrate reciprocal relationships with other-than-human life forms to make optimum use of the natural landscape. I advance a framework within which people's knowledge of the environment in matricultures is not simply given by the sum of physical and anthropic elements, but extends into a web of symbolic associations, beliefs, and practices where humans come into contact with plants, animals, atmospheric agents, and spiritual or otherworldly entities that remind them of their ritual observances.

In this framework, rituals are seen as a medium for communication between natural, social, and supra-mundane domains. Ritual performance helps to maintain or restore balance in the flow of benefits upon which humans rely for their survival, whilst the mutual obligations built through ritual performance are essential to secure the community well-being. In this sense, rituals structure economic behaviour, as McAnany and Wells understand it,[6] but they are also of great significance for nature conservation. Rituals may discourage people from collecting herbs, cutting wood, hunting, and other unregulated activities that menace the ecological balance, most notably when these take place in sealed numinous enclosures such as forested mountains, snowy peaks, and bodies of water associated with one of the said entities.

Section 2 positions the subject in relation to the theoretical accomplishments of feminist anthropology and offers a critical summary of some readings of nature and technology-based solutions to the ongoing ecological crisis. As brought forth in this first background section, while feminist-informed models have the merit of adding a gender dimension to environmental restoration and climate change mitigation programs, one cannot but notice that such models are easy to flip into empty slogans that provide no concrete answers to how women should be included in the execution of these programs.

Section 3 surveys the institutional framework of China's national development and mechanisms through which, over the recent past, environmental policies have been implemented and modernization delivered to ethnic minorities. While the United Nations (UN) have urged countries with a sizeable minority population to integrate Indigenous practices and values into their development agenda and conservation projects, China's green strategy has been slow to recognize the untapped potential of these practices, and minorities have instead been expected to update their values.

Section 4 presents two case studies illustrating how two minorities: Kham Tibetan-speaking in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Tibeto-Burman-speaking in Ninglang Yi Autonomous County, have been able to build a vast repository of environmental knowledge. This section pays close attention to matricultural constructs of nature, perceptions of landscape, and ritualized attitudes toward its protection, as well as to the gendered and moral overtones of resource management. The agency inspired by religious loyalties and women's participation in ecological preservation as lay practitioners make the bulk of the analysis.

The paper concludes by elaborating on the contribution of matricultural principles to environmental sustainability,[7] and on the practical aspects pertaining to the potential incorporation of these principles in policy to enhance ecosystem resilience and bio-cultural diversity of the areas under study.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Biological Determinism of 'Woman-Nature vs Man-Culture' and Other Dichotomies

Starting from the 1980s, numerous studies have sought to deconstruct long-held preconceived ideas about female inferiority which tend either to equate women with nature and men with culture or to lock women's experience within the private sphere of family and men's experience within the public sphere.[8] Yet it was not until the early 1990s, with mounting concern about women's role in community development, that social scientists working across many fields of inquiry began to investigate the complexity of gender dynamics in resource utilization and conservation.[9] Over the past decades, the increasing participation of women in development programs sponsored by the World Bank, UN, and other international aid institutions has signalled a rise in public awareness of issues pertaining to gender inclusivity and resource management. Nevertheless, persistent stereotypes about the alleged incapacity of women to contribute actively to economic growth have nullified efforts to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into the drafting, execution, and monitoring of these programs.[10]

Feminist-oriented anthropologists have pointed out that such issues can hardly be tackled without simultaneously engaging in a discussion of the historical and socio-economic conditions which shaped and help to perpetuate them. Some have argued that all human societies, regardless of social organization and degree of integration into the national and/or global economy, imply clear distinctions between the operations of nature and culture, and that gendered meanings more often than not are ascribed to such distinctions and to the manner in which raw natural resources are turned into finite cultural products. "[T]he distinctiveness of culture," affirms Sherry Ortner in this respect, "rests on the fact that under most circumstances it can transcend natural conditions, bend them to its purposes and control them in its interest."[11]

Women apparently do not play any part in these cultural processes. On the contrary, they are seen as an obstacle to their realization for their 'propensity toward polarized ambiguity [makes them] sometimes utterly exalted as symbols of transcendence (i.e. merciful goddesses, dispensers of salvation and heavenly justice), sometimes debased as [incarnations of] subversive[ness] (witches, castrating mothers and moral perverts), [but] rarely within the normal range of human possibilities.'[12] Attempts to avert feminine evils, such as those giving rise to death, epidemics, soil or human sterility, and other kinds of misfortune, can be found in shamanic, witchcraft, or animistic beliefs; as the history of patrilineal agriculturalist societies most clearly attests, these are generally articulated around concepts of pollution and purification.

A well-known aspect of such beliefs is that pollution – which can be roughly associated with either unrestrained natural energies or harmful spiritual powers – is thought to be capable of infecting and overthrowing everything with which it comes into contact. When pollution occurs, self-conscious, controlled, and/or symbolic actions against primordial energies need to be taken. Purification rituals grow out of this need to return balance to society. Women, who in the context of these beliefs bear correlations with the wild and occult forces of nature, are most likely to be identified with the ultimate cause of pollution or, even worse, to be accused of malevolent magic, and to be persecuted accordingly.[13]

**The Loose Threads of Ecological Feminism**

Parallel with the dichotomous and essentialist views of nature-culture, private-public, and pollution-purification, which have been found to justify women's subordination to men, is the equally dichotomous and essentialist character of ecofeminist critiques of economic development. The ecofeminist analysis contends, for example, that in patriarchal settings 'women can become the site on which tradition is reformulated' and, ergo, be easily subdued.[14] That is, where tradition intersects with patriarchal notions about women as pure, weak and submissive, a discourse often results where both are intimately interwoven and women are portrayed as little more than repositories of traditional Indigenous knowledge.[15] From this perspective, it is very difficult for women to elevate their status, and to assert agency in community development.

On this count, ecofeminist activists have raised the question of whether environmental problems represent a loss of traditional wisdom, which is to say, wisdom where women held higher status and decision-making authority. Vandana Shiva, one of the leading voices of the ecofeminist movement, suggests that women's knowledge of local ecosystems and adoption of sustainable

practices can help amend some of the shortcomings of the modernizing paradigm. She claims that *shakti* – the feminine and creative principle of Hindu cosmology which, in her line of reasoning, is defined as inherently non-patriarchal, holistic, and by some means hostile to the value-free system of modern science – should be made the key to sustainable development. Recovering this principle would imply re-assigning responsibility for ecological leadership to women, who can thereby transform development from a self-destructive process into a more equitable one.[16] Shiva's argument and others like it are problematic because they tacitly reproduce the aforementioned essentialist and dichotomous polarizations. By establishing an *a priori* intrinsic metaphysical relation between women and nature, Shiva neither provides the historical and material origins of this symbolic association,[17] nor the justification for women's stewardship and ostensibly privileged understanding of the environment. Ultimately, she does not indicate how women should work with specific institutional arrangements so as to deliver a truly eco-friendly approach to development.

Published literature on regional development and economic growth regularly indicates that, despite the above patriarchal, supra-material readings of femininity, women do play a crucial part in climate change mitigation, ecological engineering, and environmental improvement projects. This is all the more so in traditional forest and upland village communities where women maintain some control over natural resources and over decision-making, both within and outside the family.[18] Drawing on this literature, the following section gives consideration to the shifting contents and goals of China's development agenda, the politics of its environmental discourse, and the rationale supporting government-backed investments in the ethnic minority areas of the interior. The excursus will help contextualize China's environmental ambitions in northwestern Yunnan and the two case studies discussed in the last section.

## OVERVIEW OF STATE-LED DEVELOPMENT IN CHINESE MINORITY AREAS: HISTORY AND CURRENT TRENDS

In comparison with other countries with a similar population, the diversity of ethnic minority groups in China may appear quite low: so far there are 56 officially recognized nationalities, fifty-five of which are minority nationalities. The latter's total number is, however, surprisingly large. Although Beijing does not label any of its citizens as Indigenous People (hereinafter IP), there have been consistent attempts by authoritative organizations like the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), foreign NGOs in the country, affiliated aid agencies of the United Nations, and other accredited players in the field of environmental governance to use the language of Indigeneity to describe Chinese minority cultures and align them with the predicaments of the global Indigenous rights movement.[19]

Regardless of issues of naming, a 2008 survey by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) indicated that, with an estimated 105,000,000 IP over a worldwide total of 306,685,852, the Chinese minority population constitutes by far the largest on the planet.[20] These people live primarily in the western interior of the country, which covers an area of 6.87 million $km^2$ and accounts for approximately 71.5% of China's total land area.[21] According to the 2000 census, this region has an overall population of 364.5 million, of which 21.7% are non-Han ethnic

groups.[22] Even within identified minority autonomous areas in Western China, minority people account for less than half of the population: 94.6 million national minorities people of 215.6 total million inhabitants, or 43.9%.[23]

Alongside high rates of poverty among both Han and minority nationalities people in the national minority autonomous areas, other notable features applying to Western China as a whole are: (1) the high frequency of environmental emergencies; (2) the abundance of energy sources, as well as grassland, timber, water and minerals (either ferrous or non-metal ones); and (3) the high percentage of forest fires and other losses induced by natural and/or biological disasters (i.e. drought, hail, mudflow, snow storm, impoverished land productivity and rodent plague).[24] In the past half century, a wide range of poverty alleviation measures have been undertaken in this region whose aim has been to achieve economic growth and environmental sustainability and to boost national unity and border security. Unfortunately, scholarly evidence reveals that initiatives of this sort have led to uncertain outcomes.[25] These are briefly summarized as follows.

**Socialist Modernity and Political Premises of the Open-Up-the-West Campaign**

Not long after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, the central government tightened pressure on the lives of peripheral minorities through a series of unprecedented land redistribution and confiscation campaigns. These were carried out extensively across the country, affecting even the most remote pastoral villages of the Tibetan Plateau.[26]

Although hill forests, native pastures, and croplands were formally designated as either collective or national lands, which in some places became conducive to their preservation, all kinds of religious activities associated with them, including ancient beliefs about *feng shui* geomantic energies and Daoist (bio-)spiritual practices for life-cultivation, were prohibited *en masse*.[27] It was in this context that, during the Great Leap Forward (1958–61), Mao Zedong mobilized the peasantry under the slogan 'man must conquer nature' (Ch. *ren ding shengtian*). Following the ill-fated path blazed years earlier by Soviet Russia, his goal was to demolish all the structural barriers to socialist modernization.[28] By the summer of 1964, Mao's attempt to reshape the non-human world ushered in the Third Front Policy (1964–71), which bolstered manufacturing production in Western China, mostly weaponry, chemical, iron and steel, energy and nuclear industries, for the purpose of defending the country in case of foreign invasion. Correspondingly, while southern coastal provinces and main cities like Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Shanghai saw no substantial state intervention in the economy, no less than USD 24.96 billion worth of investments were poured into the mountainous interior; three hundred and eighty factories – one fifth of all large Third Front plants – relocated therein.[29]

This came with very low economic returns and catastrophic consequences for both human beings and the ecosystem.[30] Chinese scholar Dong Shikui has described the years from 1949 to 1971 as a period of "no environment[al] governance and stern environmental damage."[31] After a set of new market reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s started to gain momentum over the subsequent two decades, coastal development became one of the major priorities of the CCP leadership. On the one hand, these priorities managed to bring China into better integration with

the global market economy, on the other they did little to relieve rural areas of the interior from persistent poverty and growing social inequality.

In1999, Jiang Zemin's administration inaugurated a new bold program known as Open up the West (Ch. *xibu da kaifa*), and the effort to balance regional disparities finally began to materialize. New concerns over the region's exposure to the cycle of poverty and environmental decline were raised and written into the development agenda. One of the main goals of the program, coming second only after infrastructural development, was to strengthen ecological reconstruction through a series of fourteen nation-wide key projects. Some focused on grazing retirement, anti-desertification, and nomadic settlement, similar to those underway since September 2003. For example, in the most severely degraded grasslands of the Tibetan Plateau at the source region of the Yellow, Yangtze and Lancang rivers (*sanjiangyuan*), USD 1.15 billion funds have been allocated to Qinghai alone to set up the world's second-largest nature reserve – the Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve (SNNR).[32]

**Matricultural Principles Toward a New Going Green Approach**

The CCP's commitment to modernize the West intensified in the following years, most visibly in 2008, when China, despite the global financial crisis, featured among the top-ranking countries with the highest number of IP-related projects on poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation (China came fifth on the list, right after Brazil, Philippines, Mexico and Vietnam).[33] The number of projects has grown steadily over the last decade.

In 2019, of the one hundred and ninety-six initiatives presented to the Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) work stream of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) by over seventy governments, private, and public organizations from around the world, fifty-nine were from China (30.1%).[34] A study completed in the same year by Kelly S. Gallagher et al. reveals that over the span of roughly a decade, Chinese policy makers have designed and carried out more than one hundred individual policies to curb greenhouse emissions.[35] In line with this trend, prioritizing renewable energy while promoting development in minority areas has been set as one of the main goals to be reached by the end of 2020. Constructing new megadams on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river, as well as the Yellow, Yangtze and Lancang rivers, and expanding the country's hydropower capacity through the West-to-East Electricity Transmission Project initiated during the tenth five-year plan (2001–05) are all key elements toward this goal.[36] The environmental impact and potential destruction in biodiversity hotspots remains to be fully assessed, as the cultural and social impacts of these policies on the ethnic communities of Tibet, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. Among the issues of utmost concern is how these developments will affect the mobility of the 16,621 herder households who live within the 123,141 $km^2$ area brought under protection.[37]

Along with the challenge of responsibly adjusting community interests to the requirements of the central administration, China's state-led development policies and enthusiastic endorsement of ecological modernization (Ch. *shengtai xiandaihua*) have not mobilized enough dialogue between policy makers and Indigenous holders of environmental knowledge. How science and Indigenous views on climate change – especially those subsumed under matricultural principles that advocate communion with nature – can collaborate to undo the damage to environment is a critical

question that so far is not featured in official policies. China's broad strategy of sustainable development is based on the principle that environmental degradation can be prevented and effectively managed through technological innovation. In this persepective, the traditional non-economic mechanisms devised by locals throughout history are seen as either unscientific or not profitable enough to be counted as valid implementation tools. In some cases these very mechanisms have been identified as the ultimate causes of degradation.[38] Furthermore, there is an imperative that development goals should be accomplished by wholesale government intervention, which causes local minorities to lose confidence in their own culture and system of values while providing the central administration with a set of legal and moral justifications to administer community affairs on their behalf. This 'we-know-better' characterization of state paternalism makes it difficult for locals to be positively engaged in decision-making, and for matricultural principles to be incorporated into environmental policy.

## TWO RITUAL ECONOMIES OF NORTHWESTERN YUNNAN

The rich animistic repertoire of Indigenous peoples found in upland Southwest China reveals that humans are not the only beings with an individual personhood and that each being is assigned a specific ecological niche in the landscape. The relatedness of all-life forms requires that balance to be maintained through mutual aid, and humans to make offerings to appease or gain the favor of other beings and earthbound deities in control of natural forces. Among the minorities whose native tongue belongs to Hmong-Mien, Tibeto-Burman and Kra-Dai language families, for example, livelihood strategies and attitudes toward these forces are informed by beliefs about sacred forests and their protection, ceremonies of weather-making, and geo-pietistic reverence toward the elemental spirits of water, fire, and soil.[39]

In the matricultural systems of northwestern Yunnan, a sense of maternal bonding and intimacy pervades human interactions with the spirited nature, and cosmocentric views of life are combined with ritual magic that is deemed essential to economic choices. Indigenous men and women resort to it to compensate for poor crop yields, severe weather, deforestation, high livestock mortality and other types of loss. This epitomizes what McAnany and Wells call a ritual economy – an economy where the "process of provisioning and consuming materializes and substantiates worldview[s] and [...] cognitive realms of human experience."[40] In the ritual economy of the two ethnic communities discussed below, the agency of women is well accepted, if not institutionally sanctioned, even in strongly patrilineal settings. Among Khamba Tibetans and Mosuo people, ritualized behaviours and actions do not just create a linkage between natural and anthropic landscapes, earthly and otherworldly realms, individual and social body(ies), they make a transfer between any of these planes possible. Thus, in charting the effects of such behaviours and actions on economic processes, one is brought to wonder whether the acceptance of multiple planes of cognition – ranging from biotic life to the abiotic environment and expanding further beyond the materiality of phenomenal world – might provide a new working framework of analysis. It is within such a tentative framework that ecological relations in Khampa and Mosuo matricultures must be understood.

**Case Study 1: Diqing Tibetans**

The Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (DTAP) is an administrative division of Yunnan Province with about 400,000 inhabitants. A combination of several factors make this high plateau region on the eastern slopes of the Himalayas and, in particular, the village communities of Deqin County a case study quite unique of its kind.[41] With the Jinsha (Upper Yangtze), Lancang (Mekong), and Nu (Salween) rivers, the DTAP is home to one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world. In 1998, the prefecture was included in the Great Rivers Project, a large-scale conservation and development plan late, and the area hosts two entries in the list of UNESCO heritage sites: the Shangri-la Ecological Tourism Zone (2001) and the Three Parallel Rivers National Park (2002).[42] Within its administrative boundaries is Yunnan's biggest area of forested land. In this forest, which makes barely the 0.2% of Chinese national territory and 3% of the province's territory, there are over six thousand sub-species of wild plants distributed within twenty-two micro-climate zones, one hundred and seventy-three types of mammals, four hundred and fourteen of birds, fifty-nine of reptiles, thirty-six of amphibians and seventy-six of fish.[43] There stands also one of the highest peaks of the Hengduan Mountains and one of the eight most sacred peaks of the Tibetan tradition – the imposing Khawa Karpo (Meili Xueshan, 6740 m). This mountain complex is the seat of a homonymous warrior god celebrated in the *Epic of Gesar of Ling* (Tib. *Gling ge sar rgyal bo'i sgrung*) and his relatives. Many pilgrims, Buddhists and Bönpo animists alike, as well as mountaineering teams are drawn here every year.[44]

**Landscape Cosmologies and Sense of Community in Polyandrous Social Settings**

According to Tibetan beliefs, the physical world is inhabited by a pantheon of territorial deities – mountain gods (*yul-lha*), protectors of the ground (*sa-bdag*) and water spirits (*klu*) – who, like humans, have intentionality and exercise some control over the environment.[45] To ensure a balanced human-nature relationship, their needs must be either satisfied or kept at bay through rituals of worship, purification ceremonies, invocation formulas and techniques of propitiation.[46] These are regularly performed by a *trulku* (reincarnated Buddhist teacher) at prescribed shrines and, until the early 1950s, also by *sngags-pa* or tantric masters of various sectarian affiliations, whose magical abilities enjoyed an exceptional reputation in the village communities of eastern Tibet (Khams) where modern DTAP lies.[47] As in other Tibetan areas in and out of the People's Republic of China (PRC), religious leaders here are called upon to intercede with the aforesaid deities on behalf of the villagers so that they can be better prepared to face crises and secure the necessities of life.

A significant factor, which hitherto has not been sufficiently investigated in connection with these beliefs, is women's perceived centrality in the family. Although in Kham society descent is mostly traced patrilineally and a strong patrilineal bias can be detected in matters of inheritance, land ownership and succession to authority, kinship through women is also a consideration in attributions of social ranking. Especially in cases where fraternal polyandry (*bza' gsum*) remains predominant over other marital systems, wives may hold complementary positions of authority and domestic obligation to men, acting as headwomen alongside or sometimes in place of their male counterparts.[48] Some have held that it is due to ecological reasons and the hardship of maintaining life in such inhospitable environment that this time-honoured form of group marriage was widespread till recently and continues, to a lesser extent, even nowadays in Diqing. Ju'an

Huang, a scholar-cum-administrator who was dispatched to the area by the Nationalist Party (KMT) during the mid-1930s, offers insight on the multiple centers of power found in polyandrous households:

> One of the theories about polyandrous alliances (Ch. *yifu duoqi*) is that such alliances originate because of adverse environmental conditions which require a family to have more than one husband who provide for its needs. […] Another theory is that males are busy outdoors and someone else – another husband – must take care of the wife. […] I believe that the main reason for its origins is the fear for wealth dispersion caused by the harshness of people's living environment. Nevertheless, Deqin folks embrace polyandry [without distinction of socio-economic status]. Traditionally, the peasant household is made up of a group of brothers sharing the same wife (*xiongdi gongqi*), and the very same pattern is followed by the nobles and *tusi* (hereditary chieftains). […] Under such circumstances, not only [family] disputes never take place, but greater harmony can be promoted [in society] exactly because people accept orders from women.[49]
>
> In peripheral areas, the family structure of [Deqin's] society is one where everything gravitates around women. […] Besides plowing the fields and chopping wood, the man is responsible for child's care, selling goods [to the local market], doing the laundry and mending clothes. […] What I learned from my personal experience with Tibetans of Qinghai's pastoral areas – that is […] "the weight of the economy is measured on the scale of a woman's skirt" (Ch. *quanheng jingji shu qunju*) – certainly applies well to herder households in here. This is a good reference for all those who uphold gender equality (*nannü pingdeng*) in society.[50]

Although a wife's position as headwoman is not equal to household head, this account brings to the fore the practical resourcefulness of Deqin women in raising polyandrous households to wealth.[51] The fact that there is no single locus of domestic authority forces us to reframe the argument of women's positionality in prevailing readings of polyandry. The latter have somewhat misconstrued the internal dynamics of this social organization by overstating the importance of hierarchies between co-husbands and brothers, especially in disputes over inheritance.[52] In a fashion similar to the Nyinba Tibetans of Nepal,[53] the influence of Deqin headwomen extends out of the household. The embedment of feminine sacrality in the natural landscape suggests a multiplicity of religious concerns which correlate women's headship and related aspects of social life with local beliefs in goddesses, mythological heroes, or celestial females (Tib. *dpa'mo*), such as the mountains Sman btsun mo (Mianzumu, 6054 m) and Pa' lha dkar rdzong (Balagezong, 5545 m), consort and daughter of Khawa Karpo, respectively.[54] Furthermore, women's primal connection with the nourishing element of water is viewed as strengthening their capacity to deal with the subterranean *klu* spirits, whose worship can increase fertility and preserve life.

It follows that the gendered division of labour is not simply a reflection of marital alliances and livelihood choices. It is mirrored in access to religious resources, and, as the case of the *klu* rituals discussed below clearly attests, is found also in lay religious functions which support environmental regeneration. By performing these rituals, women carve out a space of their own in a system of practices and beliefs built around the cult of protective deities who guard over the

household and community welfare, beyond the male-dominated realm of Buddhist monasticism. In this system, ritual actions are gender specific and women's social sanction to perform them attests to the enjoyment of an unequivocal degree of autonomy. This implies the existence of an order of moral power which has less to do with Buddhism and more to do with a sense of community, its sufficiency of natural resources, and its security against external forces. Combined together, the status of women in polyandry and their execution of lay rituals grants them a maternal role in human-nature interactions.

**Human Interactions with Local Deities and Territorial Sealing**

Mountains are worshipped by and identified with villages and individual households. They are also considered kin relations, which implies human corporeality and embodied personhood. Mountains are therefore subject to the same rules of karmic retribution as humans, and mountain-gods are understood to be emanations of Buddha or transcendental beings (Tib. *'jig rten las 'das pa*). In Deqin there are many stories about mountain-gods taking animal forms or altering human subjectivities through nightmares, omens, and theopanies.

No god better than Khawa Karpo exemplifies such ability. Superimposing the two concepts of *yul-lha* and *gnas ri* (holy mountain), he is the most important tutelary deity of the Karma Kagyü lineage of Buddhism (*Kar ma Bka' brgyud*); he is also regarded by other Tibetans as the mandala of Cakrasaṃvara (paradise of *Bde mchog*, or the wheel of supreme happiness) and chief of all the local gods (*gzhi bdag*).[55] Due to his high merit (*bsod nams*), he can transform himself into any class of being; he can press hunters to cease excessive hunting by inducing harmful psychic visions which may result in death.[56] That is only one reason to fear Khawa Karpo, and there is a devotional route (*skor ra*) which begins at Yunling and goes forth to the mountain top; it carries tens of thousands of pilgrims yearly to pay their respects to the powerful god. The route includes a stop at the Yubeng springs, whose holy waters are assumed to possess healing properties.[57] During the circumambulation around the summit, which requires at least fifteen days for the external circuit and a week for the internal one, devotees buy a sprig of *Cupressus Duclouxiana* – an aromatic variety of coniferous tree which grows only in this region – to make offerings on the way. Pilgrims circumambulate the mountain to cleanse themselves of sin (*sdig pa*), and simultaneously help the forest's natural lifecycle by praying for the safety and protection of all life forms found there, from grass, flowers, trees, and insects to large animals.[58]

To enhance wildlife conservation, villagers regularly implement the *Ri-rgya sdom-pa* ritual (closing of mountain passes), a centuries-old custom overseen by the highest Buddhist authorities. Through a solemn ceremony of border demarcations, they impose a wholesale ban on tree felling, plant collecting, and hunting above a certain altitude, in some cases even on human activities *in toto*.[59] In a 1948 report about KMT-backed economic construction in Deqin, Ju'an Huang states that:

> Most mountain forests are made inaccessible by lamas, *tusi* and the local public administration who in addition to the seasonal closure of passes (Ch. *fengshan*) prohibit hunting and deforestation. […] Medicinal herbs and [animal] products like the *Ophiocordyceps Sinensis*, liliaceae plants, musk, the skin of fox, lynx and sable, antler

> velvet, bear bile and other extremely valuable items found in the mountains [around Deqin] are all subject to restrictions.[60]

Far from being a mere political tool aimed at ameliorating resource utilization, these prohibitions stem from a contractual relationship between the guest-community down in the valley and host-gods in the remote uplands which stand as an extension of the numinous world.[61] In Yubeng and Mingyong, both at the feet of the Khawa Karpo complex in the south-central part of the county within the administrative boundaries of Yunling township, they apply to all mountains above 3000–3400 metres. John Studley's 2013 survey of twelve hamlets in the Yubeng valley gauges that out of a catchment of 89 km$^2$, there is an average of three *gzhi bdag* [local deities] locales with an area of 700 ha per village. Villagers know well the location of the line that demarcates the ritually sealed enclosure of each locale and what kind of activities are allowed inside, including male access only to the mountains (8.3%) and special access for women (8.3%).[62] The line can be drawn in manifold ways, but usually it is neither clear-cut nor stable. In any case, agreements on demarcation need to be routinely ratified and conditionally updated based on proofs of moral undertaking, ritual performance, and social commitment. Around Yubeng, for example, the demarcation is marked by two large rocks, one of light colour embodying the peaceful character of savior-goddess White Dölma (Tara) and another in black personifying the fierce Green Dölma.[63]

**Supernatural Readings of Meteorological Phenomena**

As well as being visibly inscribed on this mandalized physical landscape with symbols referring to the many manifestations of divinity, gender attributions are also found in ceremonial sequences. For the most part, women are not allowed to climb up and burn offerings to mountains where male deities reside except during New Year celebrations (*lo gsar*) and only if accompanied by a man of the family. In the remaining part of the year, they are permitted to make offerings at home from village shrines specifically designed for the purpose.

Nevertheless, as lay persons, women's primary responsibility is to perform rituals for the *klu* spirits who, like the *nāgas* in South Asian cosmology, are believed to dwell close to trees or waterways. It is in these places that, under the supervision of local *trulkus*, women gather in processions by means of which they ask the spirits for a blessing upon the crops and their family, or for a cure to karmic diseases.[64] But sometimes their actions can bear unwanted consequences, such as occurred on 2 January 1991, when, independent of any clerical authority, women rallied following the announcement that a climbing team had been given permission to camp on top of Khawa Karpo and planned to conquer its summit the following day. They walked out to the Namkha Tashi Temple (Ch. *Feilaisi*), from which one can admire the view of Khawa Karpo's majestic glaciers, and raised their skirts in ritual protest, thereby expressing their disappointment over the god's surrender to the team. Their yelling and cursing angered the capricious god, who in turn provoked an avalanche that killed as many as seventeen climbers.[65] The mountain peak has remained unclimbed until today, and a poem was composed in 1999 by a local intellectual as a warning to anyone who violates its territory:

> Being spontaneously erected, the silvery snow mountain has the nature of a *stupa* / […]
> In such a supreme sacred place as *Kha ba dkar po*/ Humans […] have climbed on the

> head of the Lord of snow/ The *stupa* [performed then] all sorts of magical displays, [and] snow-dust spontaneously piled up into a heap/ [Therefore] men were buried in the deep snow in one instant.[66]

Further evidence of Deqin women's active participation in their communities' spiritual lives comes from the first-hand accounts of Chinese ethnologists, who reported that, until the 1980s, there was a specific class of house priestess known in the local Khams dialect as *tshang-pa* – in all probability a local variation of *sngags-pa* – who was very close to the Kagyü lineage. Among other activities, the *tshang-pa* recited mantras and passes from Buddhist scriptures devoted to Hayagriva and Avalokiteśvara, with the purpose of ending insect plagues and droughts or pleading for rain. In his 2009 publication, Enchang Song claimed that while every village formerly had its own *tshang-pa*, in 1983, there were perhaps twenty remaining.[67]

In the Ganden Yangcan Phuntshogling Monastery, monks also perform ceremonies that are meant to free the community from the burden of unexpected frosts, snow storms, hails and mudslides.[68] When summer comes around, women and men of Yubeng and Mingyong take part in expiatory processions and through intense sessions of collective prayer, during which incense is burnt, sutras recited, and prayer flags (Tib. *rlung rta*) hung on trees. These apology sessions are offered to local deities for chopping more fuelwood than needed, grazing livestock on the other side of the border, and other shortcomings.[69] Besides bringing down the gods' anger upon the community in the form of poor harvest, glacier retreat, incurable diseases, or adverse events of various kinds and severity, trespassing over demarcated borders may also result in a pecuniary sanction. This is imposed by a council of elders which, complementing the work done in the past by *tusi* and now by religious leaders, is in charge of overseeing social intercourse and ensuring that human activities do not disrupt the ecological balance. A practice in use until the establishment of the PRC, discarded for the entire Maoist era (1949–76), and rehabilitated in the early 1980s, the imposition of sanctions on transgressors extends today to most of the villages in Deqin. In the case of Yubeng and Mingyong, it consists in the payment of a sum of money, but until recently, wheat seeds and other types of non-cash compensation were also accepted.[70]

**Conservation under Changing Socio-Economic Conditions**

These measures have been matched by new legal mechanisms which have not substantively affected the council of elders system. However, threats to traditional Deqin social institutions are posed by the lucrative lumber industry and the re-branding of ethnic villages as exotic ecotourism destinations.

Due to the ongoing changes in state policy, the long-term effects of overexploitation of forest resources on the local economy are impossible to predict. Since the mid-1990s, central and local administrations have oscillated between very permissive policies on wood trade and the mandatory closure of timber factories. Estimates indicate that between 1960 and 1990, the total woodland area in DTAP dropped from 1,309,000 to 822,000 ha. Following the frequent floods which occurred on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River as a consequence of this dramatic shrinkage, the Central People's government announced a deforestation ban in most Tibetan upper reaches areas. Starting from September 1998, when the ban became thoroughly effective,

tremendous new efforts to stimulate tree growth were made but, unfortunately, by 2005 the DTAP's green ratio had increased only 0.3%. Meanwhile, tourism became the pillar of the economy and the motor for the construction of new facilities and the establishment of services. Lumberjacks, off-farm employees, and virtually all those who lost their job due to the deforestation ban were either absorbed into this sector or reemployed as manpower for state-run forest farms, ecological stations, and other bureaus.[71]

Notwithstanding, the traditional council of elders still stands. In this sense, the case of Yubeng is emblematic in that, just a few years ago, local elders rejected the proposal of a logging lobby who showed some interest in buying a piece of forested land where cypresses and other centenarian species flourish.[72]

**Case Study 2: Ninglang Mosuo**

In present-day Ninglang Yi Autonomous County (NYAC), Yunnan, natural scenic spots and ethnic tourism attractions have been created with no less institutional enthusiasm around Lugu Lake or, as known by the Mosuo, *Xienami* (Mother Lake). Together with another fourteen counties and cities, this area was also brought into the 1998 Great Rivers Project.[73] According to the classification criteria in use by the PRC, the Mosuo are a branch of the eastern Naxi, who identify themselves as a culturally distinctive group. On account of their strong matrilineal practices and largely marriage-less society, the Mosuo can be regarded as one of the last surviving matriarchal societies in the world.[74]

Scattered on the Yunnan-Sichuan border across Ninglang, Yanyuan, and Muli counties, which are located on the southern, eastern and northern shores of Lugu Lake, respectively, the Mosuo population in 2006 was about 40,000 people. Nearly half of the Mosuo population lives on the Yongning plain in Yunnan, a 50 $km^2$ strip of land with an average altitude of 2600 MAMSL, while the other half dwells in southwestern Sichuan, beside the same lake but on the other side of the border. Yunnan's 2006 census statistics show that the Mosuo population in that province had grown by only 30% over the past century, the lowest growth rate ever recorded in China by far. With a total 2006 population of 248,057 people in the NYAC, the Mosuo are the third most populous group in the county (17,170) after the Yi (156,518) and Han (47,341) peoples. Nevertheless, only 10,138 more men than women in NYAC bespeaks a significantly balanced sex ratio: 4.09% instead of 15%, the average sex ratio of Yunnan province in 2005.[75]

**Matriarchal Consensus, Networks of Mutual Assistance, and the Ndaba View of Nature**

Traditional Mosuo family organization pivots on the matriarch or *dabu* (household manager), whose age may range from 45 to 60 years old. Far from representing a reversal of patriarchy into another type of sexist ideology built to favour women, she incarnates a model of political solidarity wherein decisions are taken unanimously by the elderly members of a village council, authority is shared by both sexes, and the means of production (i.e. land, draught animals, work tools, and labour) are managed through mechanisms of mutual aid called *idi*. The *dabu* mediates every aspect of the village economy, from crop farming to domestic and communal responsibilities, from various forms of daily consumption to the sharing of public spaces and land plots, and the

administration of family inheritance. A network of kin-structured social relations revolving around her is understood to optimize crop yields and distribute resources in a more efficient and fair way.[76] In her capacity as house priestess, she is also responsible for rituals to please the spirits of the soil (*dibu*), as well as of initiation rituals in which young girls are recognized as reborn female ancestors.[77]

Scholars agree that, along with poor population growth, a matricultural organization of society, and its geographic isolation, the good environmental status of this remote lacustrine region is also due to the social function of the Daba [*ndaba*] ritual specialists. Before Tibetan Buddhism became a major presence during the seventeenth century, the Daba operated in a Pu-Pa (male-female) dyad[78] where incantatory skills were accorded to men and divinatory ones to women.[79] However, it is likely that in the wake of the Buddhist conversion of Mosuo and Naxi chiefs, female diviners were proscribed and that this proscription expedited the transformation of said dyadic partnership into a male-only Daba priesthood. Even if some Pa-Daba were reported as holding services in Yongning until the establishment of socialist China in 1949, nowadays virtually all Mosuo ritualists are men.[80]

In the Daba belief system, ritual observance and respect for the environment are intimately interwoven with each other. These beliefs rest on an inherently cosmocentric view of life which acknowledges each of the organisms found in nature as sentient beings endowed with a spirit. Animate or inanimate objects from the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms of life, as well as the set of physical phenomena which, like wind, thunder, fire and lightning, occasionally unleash their destructive power upon these objects, are all considered emanations of a divine quintessence that infuses the universe. All these, therefore, are venerated, feared, and, whenever possible, appeased through appropriate ceremonies similar to those performed by Naxi Dongba [*dto-mba*] priests.[81] Both Mosuo and Naxi, in fact, believe that such elemental powers can provoke serious illness if not readily addressed.[82] For example, if a person extinguishes a fire by urinating on it, he/she may suddenly fall ill and develop disturbing genital pathologies. Likewise, if someone offends the god of water, he/she will contract rashes easily, along with other harmful skin conditions. As a consequence, distinctions are made between wells from which water can be collected for human consumption and wells unsuited for such purpose because gods abide in them. Moreover, natural landscapes also affect human activities in a variety of other ways: some mountains and water streams can make people dull and vulnerable to diseases, while others can make them smart and healthy.[83] Despite such similarities, there is evidence that nature worship is more central to the Mosuo Daba than it is to the Naxi Dongba; for example, meaningful differences are noticeable in the way mountain-gods are revered.[84]

**Ecological Function of Mountain Worship and Customary Law**

As with the Khamba Tibetans of nearby DTAP, the Mosuo ascribe corporeality to mountains. They view almost all the deities who reside there as giant relatives, not simply as otherworldly entities or lords of the natural world. For example, the goddess Gamu, the legendary patroness of Yongning who dwells on the Lioness Peak (ca. 3990 m) and whose feet bathe in the western shore of Lugu Lake, is canonized as Great Mother or First Mother.[85] She is held responsible for the rise and fall of population, the productivity and failure of crops, and the increase and decrease of animal husbandry, as well as for female fertility and childbirth. Because of this, on the twenty-fifth

day of the seventh month of every lunar year, people climb the Lioness Peak to ask for the goddess' protection and favour. As tradition goes, any woman who is unable to conceive after paying her respects to Ganmu is recommended to visit Muli's wrathful protective deity Panden Lhamo (Tib. *Dpal ldan lha mo*) at the mountain cave where she lives, and drench in her holy waters. Processions similar to those for Gamu would have been held at the foothills of Mount Wuaha (ca. 4100 m) ten days previously; this massive piece of limestone is the dwelling of the strongest among Mosuo male deities, who, despite his greater height and strength, ranks lower than Gamu in the Daba pantheon.[86]

Related to the practice of worshipping sacred sites is a cluster of taboos which help preserve biodiversity. These include (1) a prohibition on damming the lake or polluting it with excrement and waste material; (2) restrictions on tree felling in the mountains and close to funerary sites; and (3) a hunting ban on the Lioness Peak during the *ri-rgya sdom-pa* season.[87] Whoever contravenes a taboo is subject to grave moral or monetary sanctions. Since the forests of oak and pine, with miscellaneous floral varieties, as well as the bears, leopards, goral, bharal and a great many other rare species of wildlife – that till the first half of the twentieth century were found on the hillsides – are all considered a symbol of community well-being, everyone in the community feels a social responsibility to safeguard them. The customs and taboos which prohibit deforestation in places of worship were so powerful that, even today, there is an anecdote circulating among Yongning residents about an unfortunate man who had one of his fingers amputated as expiation for cutting down a tree. Those who may have desecrated the forest to obtain timber illegally are said to live in fear of being soon caught by death, losing the ability to procreate, and/or exposing his/her loved ones to incurable diseases. In some cases, presumably due to the influence of Tibetan Buddhism over the region, a violation of taboos and laws implies divine punishment for the entire community, who may be assaulted by unnamed calamities with severe repercussions for crops, livestock, or the wealth of the community itself.[88]

**Social and Environmental Consequences of Cultural Change**

The Naxi and Mosuo, centered on Lijiang and Yongning respectively, are classed as one official minority nationality by the PRC and they are believed to be descended from the same people. Among both ethnicities, before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, there was a diversity of marriage and family customs, with higher degrees of sexual freedom and flexible patrilineal arrangements in the more remote mountain regions. Throughout their territory, which expands from the Lijiang Basin to the western shores of the Jinsha River at Fengke, the Naxi are universally patrilineal. Within the Lijiang basin itself, they are known to have observed a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription, strict betrothal customs, and expectations of female chastity. While the Mosuo people living in Labei, a mountainous region adjoining the Jinsha River, are patrilineal, matrilineal and mixed-descent families are found in the Yongning plain.[89]

In 1971, Anthony Jackson argued that the Naxi people of Lijiang were once matrilineal and that the Naxi had become patrilineal as a result of the imposition of Confucian political ideology by the Qing empire in the eighteenth century, when Naxi Indigenous chieftains were removed from office and the Naxi prefecture was integrated into imperial administration (Ch. *gaitu guiliu*). Further, Jackson argued that after Emperor Yongzheng (r. 1722–35) annexed Lijiang, sweeping changes in

the dress code, clan names, marriage and burial customs were enforced, and women's status was drastically reduced, giving rise to a massive wave of female suicides.[90]

Christine Mathieu, however, asserts in her 2003 monograph, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo*, that the annexation of Lijiang in 1723 aggravated a process that was set in motion earlier during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). From the fifteenth century onwards, the Lijiang élite (Mu lineage) implemented structural adjustments that shifted a system of bilateral and matrilateral marriage exchange to a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage system in order to transform the former tribal polity into a feudal three-tiered class system. After the 1723 annexation, patrilateral cross-cousin marriage exchanges endured among the most Sinicized Naxi groups of the Lijiang basin but not in the peripheral hill regions. Meanwhile, in Yongning, although Gelugpa Buddhism had supplanted the Daba animistic tradition by ca. 1710, and, as mentioned above, liturgical functions that until then were performed by female ritualists (Pa-Daba) began to be vested in their male counterparts (Pu-Daba), matriliny was incentivized through taxation, customary law, and mythological ideals. Mathieu also proposes a genealogical link between the Mosuo and Lijiang aristocracies and the Supi (Tib. *sum pa*) queens of a matriarchal state of Qiangic origins situated around modern-day Muli – the *Nüguo* described in the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynastic chronicles. As a whole, the above measures proved advantageous to the Mosuo feudal regime in that they helped maintain a balanced gender ratio, optimize land-use planning and ensure the continuation of existing social relations. Prior to 1949, for example, rice cultivation was prohibited in Mosuo territories and the land made less attractive in order to deter Han peasant men from settling on the plain and taking Mosuo women as their brides. In patrilineal Labei, though, Mosuo genealogies begin with a female ancestor and the status of wife-givers has remained higher than that of wife-takers – the opposite of what is found in patrilateral cross-cousin marriages. The people of Labei also practice uxorilocal marriage when necessary to guarantee the continuity of their households.[91]

In the wake of the earliest Communist reforms, Mosuo matriliny was weakened by the imposition of collectivisation and monogamous marriages. Especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), official policies mandated monogamy, forcing the Mosuo to renounce the custom of *nana sésé* (visiting or walking marriage), and cohabitation (*ti dzï jï mao the*).[92] Whereas during the 1960s, roughly 73% of adult Mosuo were still practicing *nana sésé* relationships and the remaining 26% had either a co-resident partner or no partner at all, by 1976 about two thirds of the total population had entered monogamous marriages.[93] Post-collectivisation, in the 1980s, the Mosuo largely returned to their former kinship practices.

By contrast, in Lijiang, the PRC government sought to proscribe the custom of ritual love suicide known as *yuvu* [to love much]. Government policies banned arranged marriages along with the traditional Dongba ceremonies that exorcised the demons of suicide (*har-la-llü-k'ö*) and were thought to contribute to the custom's romantic appeal to young women. *Yuvu* disappeared in the wake of these reforms, with isolated cases having been reported during the 1960s and 1990s. By contrast, in Yongning suicides have always been extremely rare.[94]

In the 1980s, social transformations have largely stemmed from economic integration and market reforms. This is all the more evident in the timber industry where, until the beginning of the 1980s,

private ownership of forested land was almost non-existent. With the opening of new markets, people have begun to cut trees in private- or community-own forests but are allowed to do so exclusively for wood energy consumption and housing purposes. Most of the profits from forestry production go to state-owned enterprises who comply with quotas set by the state. The years between 1959 and 1983, when the land was redistributed and nationalized, witnessed an extraordinarily high incidence of wildfires. Official sources estimate that up to 5,824 uncontained fires broke out, with 218,000 ha of forest being destroyed everlastingly and an average annual loss of over 6,650 ha. Efforts toward afforestation have been made ever since, mostly voluntarily by women, but deforestation-induced erosion of soil, mud-rock flows and floods remain frequent. These have come with deleterious consequences for the socio-ecological balance. If one considers, for example, that in 1989 Ninglang had a total forest area of 265,333.33 ha and an average ratio of forested land of 1.32 ha per capita – at that time the highest in the whole country – the fact that between 1949 and 1993 almost a quarter of it had already been logged suffices to illustrate the pressure exerted on the ecosystem.[95]

Starting from the 1990s, the development of tourism has led to an increased demand for firewood and building materials from local households. In a small village like Luoshui which counts only a few hundred permanent residents, for example, the inflow of tourists on average has exceeded 80,000 visitors a year. Activities like farming and fishing have been replaced by tourism. In 1996, nearly every household built new wooden guesthouses. Eileen R. Walsh observes that in 1999, more than fifty hotels and over 1,300 beds were made available to tourists, and in 2005, the village had beds to accommodate as many as 3,500 visitors. With villagers becoming wealthier and the young generations seeking employment in the cash economy, the imbalance in the gender division of labor has also grown. Men consume more of the household resources, and women bring in most of the earnings.[96] He Zhonghua notes that men in Luoshui receive technical training in conservation projects, whilst women are given fewer opportunities to join them while they see their own capacity in forestry being devalued, despite the fact that they collect firewood, plant and fertilize trees. On the contrary, in the village of Zhengbo where firewood supplies are extremely low, the total amount of labor spent by women and men is essentially the same. Differences between sexes are minimal and chiefly the result of seasonal adjustments: if women work more in the slack and rainy season, men are committed to do heavier jobs throughout the rest of the year. What is most significant, instead, is that women are by far more sensitive to environmental degradation. It is easier to mobilize them than men in afforestation (80%) and fighting mountain fires (40%). As to the control and distribution of household resources, women and men enjoy equal rights.[97] Up-to-date findings confirm the narrowing of gender gap. Pascale-Marie Milan (see this issue of *Matrix*) stresses that labor depends less on gender than on seniority in that, although the daily household affairs are managed by the *dabu*, all adult members – brothers and sisters – have a say in decision-making, especially decisions pertaining to heavy jobs, and assign duties (i.e. work on the fields, grazing of animals, etc.) according to age and sex.[98] In other words, gender issues are relatively complex and nuanced: the gender gap has narrowed in tourism-related areas like boating, horse riding, singing and dancing where both men and women are involved in equal measure, but in all the other areas the traditional division of labor has undergone little change. Men engage in economic matters outside of the village and contribute in the physically heavier jobs. Women take on the bulk of domestic and agricultural labour. Nevertheless, the division of labor is flexible and may vary due to circumstances and availability of labor force.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The foregoing dynamics speak of religious ways of knowing and being that hail from and are promoted locally by matricultures. In assessing the health of Indigenous ecosystems and strategic approaches to sustainability, the traditional beliefs of these cultures should be taken as a point of departure for exploring the virtually uncharted territory of trans-species ecology(ies) and for building a genuinely inclusive environmental ethic based on self-sustaining solutions and mothering values that encompass the welfare of both sexes and all species.

When viewed from the perspective of these beliefs, Indigenous knowledge of the environment is not simply about the taken-for-granted biotic and abiotic factors that make up an ecosystem. Beneath all of these lies a layer of matricultural concerns, religious taboos, geo-pietistic sentiments and attitudes, social norms and obligations, as well as a series of ritualized behaviours and actions that, taken altogether, are instrumental in heightening ecological awareness among community members and punishing who has done damage. Among them, as the two cases herewith presented best exemplify, gender-inflected ritual actions hold a central position for, without them, native conceptions of sustainability may not ensure the degree of social cohesion and self-motivation necessary to attain an equitable distribution of resources and constrain eco-unfriendly behaviours. Indeed, downplaying them in the evaluation of environmental assessments will thwart the efforts made so far in the implementation of development programs, with the inherent risk of not achieving the expected outcomes both in terms of social equity and environmental impact.

The above case studies show that women's performance of rituals in Indigenous matricultures acquire distinctive nuances in that they act as mediators of connectedness with nature but escape formal religious structures. If they have only a complementary role in religious ceremonies, the gender-equal arrangements of these cultures make women privileged decision makers within the family and their sharing communal responsibilities toward ecological resilience make them visible far beyond the domestic sphere. Tibetan and Mosuo communities of northwestern Yunnan showcase many of these arrangements. The way they envision the environment as a humanized deity and mould the socio-ecological balance upon matricultural principles could serve as a valuable model for other areas with similar settings, both in China and abroad. These principles should not simply become a further addition to the field of environmental philosophy. Nor should they become the subject matter upon which ecofeminist theory rebuilds its ontological foundations. They have practical implications for policy making that may help revamp ongoing development programs.

Development and conservation policies in DTAP and NYAC could greatly benefit from taking matricultural principles into account. Policy makers may provide a structured set of recommendations that concentrate on the following mechanisms, values and knowledge. First, monitoring and coping mechanisms which are rooted in matricultural cosmovisions and religious beliefs and which shape general knowledge about the environment, rather than mechanisms that are based solely on structural measures aimed at technological change and innovation. More attention must be attached, for example, to rituals for mountain gods and community taboos which contribute to reducing psychological vulnerability to extreme weather conditions. Such rituals exorcise lingering fear from past disaster-related life experience and deepen an

understanding of the risks posed to the community by altering human-nature relations. Second, capitalizing on the mothering values and traditional knowledge of Tibetan and Mosuo matricultures through anecdotal storytelling, myths, and cautionary poems, bio-cultural archives, ritualized procedures, and other culturally appropriate means of communication. Although these do not provide immediate solution to local environmental issues, they still help in giving advance warning to community members when things are going wrong, and in reinforcing emotional links with nature and relational empathy with species besides humans. Matricultural traditions may not only transmit viable disaster-coping strategies to younger generations, thereby minimizing knowledge or identity loss, but also serve to enhance the community's capacity to predict developing hazards and adjust their livelihoods correspondingly.

The importance of Indigenous knowledge in resource management and conservation should, nevertheless, not be over-idealized. To become fully effective, this type of knowledge, which is deeply localized, socially scattered among a plurality of actors (village elders, religious authorities, headwomen, lay practitioners, etc.), and culturally embedded in an open system of shared cognized experiences, needs to be compounded by economic incentives that are gender-inclusive and compatible with religious beliefs. The life-affirming values of mothering that in matricultures permeate the economy and connect humans with deified nature should be called upon in a decision-making process while the institutional scaffolding of development campaigns has much to gain by being inclusive of traditional cultural knowledge.

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**Endnotes**
1. On upland Asia in general, see Kelkar and Nathan, "Introduction"; Agarwal, "The Gender and Environment Debate", pp. 136-138. On China with reference to both Han and minority

cultures, see Jacka, “Approaches to Women and Development”, pp. 587-588, 590-591; Du, “Gender Norms among Ethnic Minorities”, pp. 249-251, 257-259.

2. Gabriel et al., “Roles of Indigenous Women.”
3. I hereby endorse Guédon’s wisdom and use “the expression ‘matricultural system’ to designate that part or those components of culture that sustain, express, and welcome women’s participation in the socio-cultural fabric, whether it sustains a matrilineal kinship system or not” (Guédon, “Introduction”, p. 6). This implies, as Passman puts it, “partnership between the sexes, with the expected division of labor determined by gender” (Passman, “Out of the Closet”, p. 185). For the purpose of this study, social polyandry, as discussed in section 4 (case study 1), is also included into such system.
4. Following Huber and Pedersen’s example, I replace the vague notion of nature with that of ‘knowledge about the environment’ which I believe conveys a more accurate approximation of people’s understanding of, and approaches toward, the physical and phenomenal environment. Huber and Pedersen, “Meteorological Knowledge and Environmental Ideas”, pp. 577-578.
5. That religion may serve as a thermostat that regulates human-environment interactions and that ritual performances may fulfill adaptive functions in declining ecological conditions has been a subject of anthropological reflection since Rappaport published his most-cited ethnography of the Tsembaga of New Guinea in the late 1960s. Contributions from this strain of scholarship have informed a new experiential and non-materialistic approach to sustainability. They have shown, for example, that ritual arises from practical concerns and ritualized relationships with the other-than-human world help ecosystems maintain equilibrium rebalancing man-land ratios, redistributing food surplus, and facilitating exchange of goods (Rappaport, “Ritual Regulation”, pp. 28-29). Despite greater public attention to religious beliefs, ethics and practices in biodiversity conservation and sustained effort to write the protection of sacred natural sites into law (see *inter alia* UNEP, *Cultural and Spiritual Values*; IUCN, *Information Paper*), thus far international institutions and specialized agencies that work to promote environmentally sustainable growth in traditional societies have yet to organically integrate ritualized aspects of Indigenous resource utilization into their policy pronouncements.
6. McAnany and Wells, “Toward a Theory of Ritual Economy.”
7. In drawing on Göttner-Abendroth’s notion of ‘mothering’ (Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies*, p. 33) and aligning myself with Wolfstone’s effort to transcend ecofeminist scholarship, I define matricultural principles as the maternal ethics of care-taking and reciprocal giving as applied to human-nature relations, economics and socio-political institutions. These principles are understood to be embedded in a culture that: (1) “recognizes the power to generate life [a]s critical to [its own] continuity”, and (2) “valorize[s] natality, in its literal and metaphoric meanings, [by] elevat[ing] the maternal for its creative, spiritual, affective, educational and judicial contributions to cultural continuity” (Wolfstone, “EcoPhilosophies”, p. 7).
8. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, pp. 1-41, 164-190; Siltanen and Stanworth, “The Politics of Private Woman and Public Man.” Most noteworthy are the theoretical advancements brought about by Marxist and post-modernist thinkers, like Haraway, whose watershed essay on anti-essentialized femininity(ies) has exposed how the construction of gender roles alongside nature/culture, public/private and like distinctions is invariably tied up to patriarchal modes of

economic organization and the exercising of coercive power by modern state apparatuses and their technocratic assumptions (Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”, pp. 100-102, 106-108).

9. Zein-Elabdin, “Development, Gender, and the Environment.”
10. An up-to-date comprehensive report on this topic is UN Women, *Turning Promises into Action*.
11. Ortner, “Female to Male”, pp. 72-73.
12. *Ibid.*, 86 (own rephrasing).
13. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 2-4, 94-98, 146-155 (*passim*); Winkelman, *Shamans, Priests and Witches*, pp. 77-81, 86-87. Cfr. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 40-41 (elaborating on the work of R. Herz, R. Needham, P. Rigby, and T. O. Beidelman).
14. Mani, “Contentious Traditions”, p. 153 (text slightly modified).
15. *Ibidem*.
16. Shiva, *Staying Alive*, pp. 38-54.
17. Zein-Elabdin, *op. cit.*, p. 934.
18. IUCN et al., *Training Manual*, pp. 155-158; WEDO et al., *Gender and Climate Change*, pp. 8-21; UNEP, *Global Gender*, 2016(a), pp. 152-166, and Id., *Global Gender*, 2016(b), pp. 58-63.
19. Hathaway, “China’s Indigenous Peoples?”
20. Sobrevila, *The Role of Indigenous Peoples*, pp. 3-5, tab. 1.
21. Shen, “Population Growth, Ecological Degradation and Construction”, p. 637.
22. Goodman, “The Campaign to Open up the West”, pp. 322-323, tab. 1.
23. NBSC, *China Statistical Yearbook*, tab. 25.19. Autonomous areas refer to the five ethnic autonomous regions – namely Guangxi (Zhuang minority), Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang (Turkic Uyghurs) and Ningxia (Hui or Sinophone Muslims) – 30 autonomous prefectures and 120 autonomous counties.
24. *Ibid.*, tabb. 8.5, 8.6, 8.11, 8.25 and 8.27 on natural resources by region; tabb. 8.30, 8.31, 8.32, 8.33 and 8.34 for detailed statistics on environmental conditions.
25. Jeong, “Ethnic Minorities.”
26. Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, pp. 122-126; Hayes, *A Change in Worlds*, pp. 105-112. On the gender undertones of these campaigns, see Makley, *The Violence of Liberation*, pp. 114-119.
27. Coggins, “When the Land is Excellent”, pp. 108-109.
28. Shapiro, *Mao’s War Against Nature*, pp. 67ff.
29. All key financial figures quoted in this paper are converted from the Chinese Yuan based on the exchange rate as of December 14, 2020 (1 USD = 6.538 RMB).
30. Shapiro, *Mao’s War Against Nature*, pp. 145-149 (cit. Shi and He, *Zhiqing Beiwanglu*, p. 161); Wei, *Regional Development in China*, pp. 77-82.
31. Dong, “Environmental Struggles and Innovations”, pp. 29-32.
32. Yeh, “Green Governmentality and Pastoralism”, pp. 10-12; Ptackova, “Sedentarisation of Tibetan Nomads”; Du, “Ecological Resettlement of Tibetan Herders”, pp. 116-117.
33. Sobrevila, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21, and fig. 5.
34. UNEP, “NBS for Climate.”
35. Gallagher, “Assessing the Policy Gaps.”
36. IWGIA, *The Indigenous World*, pp. 227-228.
37. Administration Bureau, “Sanjiangyuan Guojia Gongyuan.”
38. It is believed, for example, that the hill tribes who keep practicing traditional slash-and-burn agriculture have gravely deteriorated forest ecosystems in Yunnan and other minority areas in

Southwest China on the grounds that they waste huge amounts of fuelwood to maintain their livelihoods (Yin, *Wenhua Shengtai Tixi*, pp. 9, 12-13, 22-35, and Id., *Ren yu Senlin*, pp. 10-17).

39. See respectively Schein, *The Miao and the Feminine*, pp. 214-216, 221-228; P.K. He, "Zhongguo Shaoshu Minzu", pp. 44-46 (cases 4.11, 4.15), and pp. 51-53 (cases 4.6-12, 4.6-13, 4.6-14); Pei, "Conservation of Biological Diversity."
40. McAnany and Wells, "Toward a Theory of Ritual Economy", p. 1.
41. Figures come from NBSC's official website, see http://www.cnstats.org/rkpc/ (last retrieved October 31, 2018). They refer to the fifth official census of Chinese population by ethnic composition and distribution as estimated on November 1, 2010. The other two counties that together with Deqin make up the DTAP are Shangri-la (formerly Zhongdian, in the easterly portion of the prefecture) and Weixi (to the southwest). Altogether they have an ethnic population of 326,789 individuals (81.7% of total), whereby Tibetans represent the largest group (129,496, equivalent to 32.4%).
42. Ou, "The Yunnan Great Rivers Project", p. 74; UNESCO, *World Heritage Nomination*, pp. 1-5.
43. Qi et al., *Diqing Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang*, p. 144; Ma, "Dangdai Zangqu de Shengwu Duoyangxing", pp. 3-4.
44. Wang, "Zangqu Shenshan Chongbai", pp. 75-76.
45. These local deities manifest themselves in the natural landscape following a three-layers spatial ordering, whereby (1) the *yul-lha* occupy the upper domain of gods (*stenglha*); (2) humans are right beneath them together with the *sa-bdag*, boulders, mountain springs and animal spirits in the so-called *barsam* (lit. the middle realm); (3) the *klu* dwell in the underworld (*yoglu*) alongside fishes and semi-aquatic chthonic beings. Such tripartite cosmology is also ideally replicated on a lower level in the household with the shrine of house divinities (*p'alha*) and family's living spaces. Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State*, pp. 151-153. On the myriad of other deities who are ingrained in the landscape and act as both protectors and angry gods, see also de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons*, pp. 203-252.
46. Huber and Pedersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 584-585; de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 467-480.
47. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 470. The most representative case is that of Rinpoche Khamtrül Ngak'chang Yeshé Dorje (1926–93), a leading exponent of the Nyingmapa school (Tib. rNying ma pa) who originally came from the nearby Markham County, in today's Chamdo Prefecture (Tibet Autonomous Region, TAR). For a detailed account of his engagement in weather-control rituals, refer to Woolf and Blanc, *The Rainmaker*, pp. 25-34, 49-52, 57ff (*passim*).
48. These women are known as *nang ma* (lit. mothers of the house) in Bainang (southern Shigatse Prefecture, TAR), and *dag mo* among the Tibetan-speaking Nyinba in Humla (northwestern Nepal). Levine, "Fathers and Sons", pp. 271-272; Jiao, *Socio-economic and Cultural Factors*, pp. 101-102; Luintel, "Agency, Autonomy and the Shared Sexuality", pp. 52-53.
49. Huang, "Yunnan Deqin Shezhiju", pp. 464-465 (emphasis in the original). All translations from Chinese are my own.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 466.
51. This is not the place to reiterate old debates on whether polyandrous women have equal, lower or higher status than men, nor is this an attempt to align my work with those who, like the author of the excerpt above, ascribe purely economic causes to polyandry. For a critical examination of the economic concomitants and implications of polyandry for women's status, see Levine and Sangree, "Conclusion", pp. 390-393.

52. Fjeld, “When Brothers Separate.” In Fjield’s analysis, the in-married wife (Tib. *mna’ ma*) is depicted as a passive reproductive subject, and her inability to distribute affection fairly among co-husbands is seen as instrumental for their claims over land ownership. If it is true that these might manipulate the situation for their own interests, Fjield seems to ignore that the way the *mna’ ma* designates paternity and works to minimize the risk of household partition triggered by fraternal hostilities offers a space for women to exert themselves. This is per se a source of power in that it allows women to validate kinship ties and strengthen their position within the household and society.
53. Levine, *Dynamics of Polyandry*, pp. 118-119, 209-210.
54. Sman btsun mo is regarded as holy by the Naxi as well. Coggins and Zeren, “Animate Landscapes”, pp. 218-221; Wang, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 80 (tab. 1).
55. Buffetrille, “The Pilgrimage to Mount Kha ba dkar po”, pp. 198-201, 213.
56. Da Col, “The View from Somewhen”, pp. 221-222, 226-228; Studley, *Custodians of the Tibetan Spiritscape*, pp. 40, 41 (note 133), 43-44.
57. Litzinger, “The Mobilization of Nature”, pp. 496, 502-503; Guo, *Fazhan de Fansi*, pp. 175-177.
58. Ai, “Zongjiao Shengjing”, pp. 75-76.
59. Generalities on this practice in Huber, “Territorial Control by Sealing.”
60. Huang, *op. cit.*, p. 455.
61. Coggins and Hutchinson, “The Political Ecology of Geopiety”, pp. 93, 99 (cit. Da Col, pers. com. 2004).
62. Studley, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 27.
63. Guo, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
64. Coggins and Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 97 (cit. Yangzong and Sinang Dorje, pers. com. 2006). Cfr. Woodhouse et al., “Religious Relationships with the Environment”, pp. 299-300 (with reference to western Sichuan, still in the Khams region of ethnographic Tibet).
65. Litzinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 496-497.
66. Buffetrille, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
67. Song, “Diqing Zangzu Lamajiao”, p. 92. Cfr. Wang, “Diqing Zangzu Lishi”, pp. 100-101. I am grateful to Kun-chen Alan Chang (National Cheng-chi University) for double-checking the transcription of these Tibetan terms and confirming this piece of information.
68. Yin, *Qihou Renleixue*, p. 190.
69. Guo, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-185.
70. Zhang, “Yunnan Zangzu de Shenshan Xinyang”, pp. 135-136.
71. Qi et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 144, 170-171, 254-255 (all land area estimates are converted from the Chinese mu, 1 mu = 0.07 ha). Western analysts, based on data gathered from the forestry bureau, explain that the timber market before the 1998 ban was able to generate up to USD 55.96 million a year (over the 80% of the GDP of the entire prefecture), and 58 million in government revenues and taxes. More in Hillman, “Paradise Under Construction”, pp. 175-176 (notes 3, and 5).
72. Guo, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.
73. Litzinger, *op. cit.*, p. 490 (note 6). Other counties comprise Deqin, Zhongdian and Weixi in DTAP; Gongshan, Fugong, Lushui and Lanping in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture; Dali, Binchuan, Jianchuan, Heqing, Eryuan and Yulong in Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture. Besides them, there is also the prefecture-level city of Lijiang. Accommodating more than 3 million

people (7.5% of Yunnan's total) over an area of about 68,000 sq. km, these are mostly inhabited by minorities of varied ethnic ancestry.

74. This distinguishes them from their sinicized Naxi cousins of the nearby Lijiang basin (the western Naxi, or Naxi proper), whose élites broke off with matrilateral alliance customs no later than the middle Ming period (ca. 1545) (explored further below). Mathieu, "Love and Marriage", pp. 252-254.
75. Yang et al., *Ninglang Yizu Zizhixian Gaikuang*, p. 10; Yan et al., "Analysis of the Role of the Mosuo Culture", p. 52.
76. Göttner-Abendroth, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Cai, *A Society Without Fathers or Husbands*, pp. 122-125, 171-175; Shih, "Genesis of Marriage", p. 385. Some, however, hold the view that while in some places (Labei) the *dabu* is indeed a female-only institution, in some others (Yongning) it is not necessarily so.
77. Li, *Daba Wenhua*, pp. 89-90; Göttner-Abendroth, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 129 (note 8).
78. *Ndaba* can refer either to the person who supersedes ceremonies and recites magic formulas (transmitted only by spoken word) or to the set of religious beliefs which is embodied by such person. Etymological clarifications in Rock, "Shamanism of the Tibetan-Chinese Borderland", p. 805 (cit. in Mathieu, "The Moso Ddaba Religious Specialists", pp. 209, and 232, note 1).
79. Mathieu, *Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland*, p. 123.
80. The official conversion of the Yongning chiefs to the Gelugpa school of Buddhism (Tib. *dGe lugs pa*) came after terrible conflicts between Bön-po animists and the Gelugpa backed by the Mongols. The Lijiang chiefs, instead, opted for the Karma Kagyü which enjoyed the support of Manchu emperors. Mathieu, "The Story of Bon", pp. 373-375; Cai, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
81. Li, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-99.
82. Wang et al., *Yunnan Sichuan Naxizu*, pp. 175, 217.
83. P.K. He, "Senlin yu Minzu Yiyao", p. 73.
84. Mathieu, "The Moso Ddaba", pp. 223-224.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225; Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, pp. 382-383.
86. Wang et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.
87. Rock, *op. cit.*, pp. 418-419; Li, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-157; Yan et al., *op. cit.*, p. 51.
88. P.K. He, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Z.H. He, "Forest Management", pp. 160-161.
89. Z.H. He, *op. cit.*, pp. 147, 153; Mathieu, *Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland*, pp. 19, 45 (note 58), 235-236.
90. Jackson, "Kinship, Suicide and Pictographs", pp. 59-61, 87-88.
91. Mathieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-166, 240-243 (*passim*), 402-403, 407-409; Id., "Love and Marriage", pp. 252-253, 260-261.
92. Cai, *op. cit.*, pp. 185, 385-395; Shih, *The Moso*, pp. 85, 99 (cit. in Mathieu, *Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland*, pp. 241-243, 399).
93. Knödel, "Yongning Moso Kinship", p. 57.
94. Mathieu, "Love and Marriage", pp. 236-238, 263-264; Yang, *Yulong Qingshang*, pp. 2-7, 12-17. Although the oldest ritual text dealing with the *har-la-llü-k'ö* dates 1851, love-pact suicide in Lijiang may have very ancient roots that go back to the Yongzheng reign or even before the Manchus ruled over China, but given the current state of research it is hard to estimate with certainty when the Naxi started to practice it.
95. Yang et al., *op. cit.*, p. 126; Z.H. He, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.
96. Walsh, "From Nü Guo to Nü'er Guo", pp. 458-459, 478-479.

97. Z.H. He, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155, 164, 167-168, 171.
98. Milan, “Entraide et Réciprocité.”

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# Entraide et réciprocité chez les Na de Chine. Une lecture de la socialité na et de la centralité des maisons dans l'organisation sociale.

**PASCALE-MARIE MILAN, PhD**

**Résumé**

*Chez les Na de Chine, où se pratique encore une agriculture de subsistance, de nombreux travaux sont menés sur l'entraide. En proposant une ethnographie des formes d'entraide, jusque-là tout au plus mentionnées dans les travaux anthropologiques sur les Na, l'article propose une lecture de l'organisation sociale élargissant l'analyse des faits de parenté de cette société matrilinéaire et matrilocale. À partir d'un cadre théorique et interprétatif de l'économie de subsistance, l'article considère les manifestations et le fonctionnement de l'entraide à différentes échelles : dans la maison, entre maisons et au regard de la communauté villageoise, et offre ainsi une lecture des valeurs éthiques qui s'en dégage. Matrice de la socialité na, l'entraide se révèle être un système de coopération structurant et réactualisant sans cesse les rapports entre maisons par le biais de réciprocités organisées en tenant compte de l'idéal matrilinéaire. Il met ainsi en lumière la complémentarité des maisons et de la matrilinéarité dans l'organisation sociale.*

**Mots-clefs**

Entraide, réciprocité, maison, matrilinéarité, socialité.

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*Among the Na of China, who still practice subsistence agriculture, much work is carried out on the basis of mutual aid. By proposing an ethnography of the forms of mutual aid, which until now have been, at most, merely mentioned in anthropological work on the Na, the article offers a reading of social organization that broadens the analysis of kinship information pertaining to this matrilineal and matrilocal society. Taking as its starting point the theoretical and interpretative framework of the subsistence economy, the author considers the manifestations and functioning of mutual aid at different*

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*scales: within the household, between houses, and with regard to the village community, thereby offering a reading of the ethical values that emerge from mutual aid. As the matrix of Na sociality, mutual aid emerges as a system of cooperation that continually structures and renews the relationships between houses through reciprocities organized in was that take into account the matrilineal ideal. Mutual aid thus highlights the complementarity of houses and matrilineality within social organization.*

**Keywords**
Na, Mutual aid, reciprocity, house, matrilineality, sociality.

Comme bien d'autres populations rurales et montagnardes, les Na de Chine organisent leurs moyens de subsistance autour de l'agriculture. Dans les vallées qui culminent à plus de 2700 mètres d'altitude, ils cultivent le sarrasin, l'orge, les pommes de terre, le maïs et des légumes. Depuis les années 1980, les habitants de la plaine de Yongning cultivent le riz[1]. Les Na pratiquent aussi l'élevage. Si les tracteurs ont été introduits dans les années 2000, le bétail (dont la valeur symbolique est d'importance) est toujours élevé pour effectuer les travaux agricoles. Les cochons, moutons et chèvres sont élevés pour la nourriture et les produits dérivés. Alors que le tourisme a créé de nouvelles opportunités de subsistance et d'enrichissement à partir des années 1990, l'agriculture et l'élevage restent pour nombre de villages non touristiques les ressources principales par lesquelles subvenir à leurs besoins.

Tout comme ils le font pour la construction des maisons ou la coupe du bois, les Na s'organisent à travers des réseaux d'entraide pour effectuer les travaux agricoles d'ampleur tel le labour, les plantations et les récoltes. Malgré la centralité et la régularité de ces pratiques dans la vie quotidienne, la littérature anthropologique sur les Na, plutôt dominée par l'étude de la parenté, n'a fait que mentionner l'existence d'une « coopération » entre maisons parentes ou voisines (Guo 1996, Cai, 1997, Walsh 2001b, Weng 2007, Shih 2010 : 79). Peu nombreux sont ceux qui ont relevé par exemple l'aide apportée par un *hrantchouba* à la maison de sa *tchumi* (Walsh 2001 : 159-162, Shih 2010 : 75, 162). À Lijiazui, un village situé entre les villes de Muli (Sichuan) et de Yongning (Yunnan), l'intensité de ces relations est telle qu'elle permet de mettre en évidence la structuration du monde social.

1 Durant l'époque féodale la culture du riz était interdite pour décourager l'immigration Han (Rock 1947:388).

*Carte 1 : carte resserrée sur la région où vivent les Na et les trois villages de l'enquête. (Extraite de Milan 2016 : 30 ; conception : Helder Da Silva).*

Le village comprend quatre cent cinquante-six habitants établis en trente-six maisons. Au cours de multiples enquêtes de terrain entre 2012 et 2014, j'ai pu observer l'organisation de l'entraide entre maisons suivant trois modalités principales: des relations de parenté stables entre lignages, des relations sans cesse renouvelées entre voisins, et des relations bien établies entre partenaires sexuels. Ces recherches qui ont été entreprises durant différents évènements où l'entraide est particulièrement nécessaire (construction de maison, travaux agricoles, rituels de protections des maisons, festivités) ont permis de collecter des données sur les modalités de fonctionnement normatives. J'ai mené des entretiens avec au moins un résident de chaque maison du village ainsi qu'une ethnographie approfondie auprès de dix maisons pour recueillir des informations sur la généalogie, la division du travail selon le sexe, et l'organisation de l'entraide dans la maison. Lors de l'observation et la participation aux travaux agricoles, j'ai pu recenser la composition des équipes de travailleurs-aidants et mener des entretiens informels avec ces derniers permettant de les connecter à la fois à leur maison maternelle et celle de leur père.

Sur la base de ces matériaux, cet article propose d'exposer les manifestations et le fonctionnement de l'entraide dans les communautés locales, d'une part en restituant le sens que les villageois donnent à l'entraide, et d'autre part, en considérant les effets de l'entraide sur les rapports sociaux. Cette démarche empirico-inductive invite à considérer des éléments de cadrages théoriques et interprétatifs relatifs aux économies enchâssées (Polanyi 1983, Sahlins 2011). Le but est de distinguer différents niveaux d'action : depuis le niveau microsociologique des relations entre proches dans les maisons, jusqu'à celui de l'action et de l'interprétation collective. La circulation des personnes permet d'identifier le registre dans lequel l'entraide se déploie : la réciprocité ou l'échange. La relation de réciprocité met en jeu des valeurs éthiques et un lien social qui se

différencie de l'échange dans la mesure où elle implique une relation entre sujets, alors que l'échange implique des objets. De plus, les Na différencient l'entraide (*gragra*) de l'échange (*khrakhra*). Dans leurs pratiques, l'échange correspond à une relation dualiste pouvant inclure le troc. C'est alors le contexte qui donne sens à la profondeur du lien engagé. L'entraide est par contre toujours réciproque. L'article vise à mettre en lumière cette réciprocité pour évaluer l'importance de l'entraide dans l'organisation sociale et montrer la complémentarité des maisons et de la matrilinéarité dans la structuration du monde social.

Pour comprendre l'entraide, il faut, dans un premier temps, revoir les unités sociales et les éléments de parenté d'importance chez les Na. Il subsiste en effet des quiproquos et des divergences dans les analyses des conceptions indigènes. La mise en lumière des catégories sociales permet de relever, dans un deuxième temps, les éléments de cadrage théorique pertinents pour lire les conceptions na de l'entraide. La description des échelles auxquelles opère l'entraide offre l'occasion, dans un troisième temps, de comprendre la centralité des maisons comme lieu de décision, et dans un quatrième temps, de mettre en évidence l'étendue et les relations préférentielles de ces réseaux. Enfin, dans un dernier temps, la synthèse des rapports entretenus dans et entre les maisons mettra en évidence la structure de réciprocité qui informe la socialité na et permettra de considérer l'entraide comme un élément essentiel du système économique[2] reposant non seulement sur les maisons en tant que lieux d'habitation, mais aussi sur les lignages dans l'organisation sociale.

**Des maisons et des lignages: sur quelques notions d'importances pour comprendre l'entraide.**

Les Na, bien connus pour être un cas extrême des sociétés matrilinéaires et matrilocales, ont souvent été dépeints à tort comme une société qui ne connaitrait ni le mariage ni la paternité (Cai 1997). L'institution de visite nocturne des hommes chez les femmes, nommée *séssé*, est première dans l'organisation des rapports sexuels. Différents anthropologues tels que Zhou Huashan (2003) et Shih Chuan-Kang (2010) ont établi qu'un homme en partenariat sexuel avec une femme est désigné en langue na comme le *hrantchouba* et la femme sa *tchumi*. Les partenaires sexuels vivent respectivement dans leurs maisons de naissance. Caractérisée de « non-contractuelle, non-obligatoire et non-exclusive », cette institution sexuelle est un système particulièrement flexible qui explique en partie la difficulté de classer le système de parenté na (Shih 1993, 2000 : 700, 2010). Si le mariage n'est pas une institution primaire chez les Na, des banquets (*gutch*), moments de rassemblement des proches, des amis et des voisins permettent de sceller l'union de deux partenaires. Ces pratiques visent à rendre publiques des liens familiaux (*krade to*) avec une autre maison. De plus en plus courant, le banquet célèbre soit un mariage soit la cohabitation de deux partenaires résultant le plus souvent d'une captation de l'un des partenaires par la maison de l'autre partenaire pour rééquilibrer une balance genrée défavorable (voir également Shih 2000 :6, 2010 : 101- 131, Blumenfield 2010 : 297).

2 J'utilise à défaut un langage donnant à voir l'économique comme un domaine à part entière. Je suggère toutefois que malgré l'utilisation du cadre d'analyse de Polanyi, nos catégories de pensées contemporaines nous mènent à utiliser un langage faisant référence à l'économique comme un domaine nécessaire autonome du monde social. Je suggèrerais plus loin d'autres alternatives de langage ou de cadre d'analyse permettant de décrire concrètement cet enchâssement. Pour les besoins de la démonstration, j'utilise pour l'instant ce langage.

Au fondement de la reproduction sociale du groupe réside toutefois l'idée que les femmes transmettent l'os[3] (*ong*) à leur progéniture et que le partenaire sexuel de la femme ne fait, selon le proverbe, qu'arroser, comme la pluie permet à l'herbe de pousser. Lorsqu'un enfant naît de ce partenariat, il appartient donc au lignage (*sizi*) de la mère. La transmission de l'hérédité par les femmes est symbolisée par une flèche (*zé*)[4]. Le lignage du géniteur n'entre pas en considération, contrairement aux systèmes bilinéaires, et il n'existe ainsi aucun terme permettant de désigner les sœurs ou les frères du père et autres membres de sa famille (Shih 2010 : 144). Plusieurs anthropologues ont cependant identifié des termes qui, variant d'une localité à l'autre, désignent les géniteurs, ce que mes propres données ethnographiques ont confirmé. Le terme *ave* (ə˧v̩˥) est utilisé à Xiaoluoshui et autour du lac Lugu ; le terme *ada* (ə˧dɑ˥) est utilisé du côté du Sichuan ; le terme *abo* (ə˧bo˥) est utilisé à Zebo (situé dans la plaine de Yongning). Comme l'a remarqué Lamu Gatusa, le terme *awu* (ə˧v̩˥), est utilisé pour nommer le géniteur à Yongning où, comme je l'ai remarqué, il correspond aussi au terme utilisé pour désigner le frère de la mère[5]. Les données de Shih Chuang-Kang mettent en lumière les termes d'*ada* et *ubo* (2010 ; 139). Christine Mathieu a, quant à elle, relevé en 1992 à Labei le terme d'*adda* utilisé pour s'adresser au géniteur et *abo* pour s'y référer (Mathieu 2003: 318). Zhou Huashan a aussi constaté le terme d'*abo* (2003, 2009). Une étude récente a même montré différentes formes d'investissement paternel (Mattisson et al. 2014).

Shih Chuan-Kang qualifie le *sizi*, terme désignant le matrilignage, de groupe de descendance (*descent group*). Il considère *le sizi* comme l'unique catégorie d'organisation de la parenté chez les Na (2010 : 98 et 20), et il identifie la maisonnée: le *yidu* (*household*[6]) comme une unité sociale de base, en tant que groupe domestique :

> *(…) yidu est le groupe domestique à l'intérieur duquel les gens organisent et partagent leur vie quotidienne, et sizi, le groupe de descendance Moso, désigne l'organisation de parenté dans lequel les gens s'acquittent de leurs responsabilités communes envers le soin des ancêtres décédés.* (Shih 2010: 19-20)

Shih Chuan-Kang argumente ainsi que le groupe désigné par le terme *yidu* participe à l'organisation de la parenté sans être un groupe de parenté en tant que tel (2010 : 150).
Une analyse des relations entre proches (*relatedness*) (Carsten 2000), d'une part, et de la parenté vécue au quotidien (Weber 2013), d'autre part, met effectivement en évidence la nécessité de considérer le *yidu*, également nommé *zidu*, comme une unité sociale organisationnelle. Dans les explications données par mes informateurs, la notion de *yidu* fait référence à la lignée (*sizi*) et donc

3 Dans nombre de sociétés tibétaines l'os et la chair définissent, respectivement, la transmission masculine et féminine de la lignée (Levine 1981 1987 1988). Chez les Na l'os se transmet par la matrilignée. Christine Mathieu recense cependant l'utilisation de ce terme chez les Na de Labei pour lesquels la descendance se fait en ligne patrilinéaire.
4 Ce terme fait référence de manière métaphorique au matrilignage. La lignée du père est indiquée par le terme *ami* qui signifie racine en français. L'ethnonyme Nazé auquel se réfèrent Weng (1993) à Lijiazui (Sichuan) et Harrell (2001) à Guabie (Sichuan), traduit d'ailleurs l'idée d'une ascendance commune au groupe na. D'un point de vue linguistique la langue na ajoute des suffixes à l'ethnonyme Na pour qualifier un aspect du monde social ou un autre. Les ethnonymes attribués aux Na tels que *Nahi*, *Nahing*, *Nari*, *Naru*, *Nazé* décrivent ainsi des configurations relationnelles. *Nari*, *Naru*, *Nahi* ou *Nahing* sont des variantes phonétiques qui définissent les *personnes na*. *Nazé* est le terme qui définit le groupe en entier.
5 Conversation personnelle avec Christine Mathieu 4 novembre 2020. Ce cas de figure est d'une importance majeure étant donné l'impossibilité théorique qu'un terme co-lexifie le géniteur et l'oncle maternel.
6 Il mentionne qu'une traduction fine du terme en anglais serait 'home' (2010 : 174).

aux ancêtres (*azé-apu*) ainsi qu'aux rapports frère/sœur (*mwamenimi*) vivant dans une même maisonnée ; le terme *yidu* est le plus souvent traduit en chinois par le terme de famille (*jiating* 家庭), ce qui accentue la connotations de proximité parentale. La notion de *yidu* se confond parfois avec celle d'*awo*, ce terme étant préféré dans le langage quotidien pour désigner la maisonnée. Le terme *awo* qui signifie également l' « intérieur », la « racine », la « base »,-correspond en effet à la maisonnée et à la maison autant dans sa dimension architecturale et spatiale que dans ses fonctions rassemblant les êtres vivants qui l'habitent. L'*awo* inclut le *yidu* et le bétail, le second étant le signe d'une maison prospère. Pour se référer à la construction en bois (*awo zhimi*) dans laquelle ils vivent et à tous les « gens de la maison » (*awo hing*), le terme *awo* précédé par le nom de la maison est utilisé dans le langage courant. Les maisons prennent généralement le nom de leur lignage qu'elles se transmettent de génération en génération. Lorsque les maisons qui partagent le même nom sont trop nombreuses, comme c'est le cas pour les six maisons M [7] de Lijiazui, on peut alors les désigner d'après leur localisation géographique telle que *krama* (au bord du lac), *douke* (à flanc de montagne), etc. Lorsque les membres de l'*awo* sont considérés comme trop nombreux, on établit un nouveau *yidu* dans une nouvelle maison (*awo*) (voir aussi Hsu 1998b : 69). Une des sœurs de la génération *mwamenimi* ou *aze-apu* (voir diagramme de la maison g1 plus bas) quitte alors la maison avec ses descendants et parfois aussi avec un autre membre de sa génération. Les lignages se divisent (*zitu*) donc au gré des évènements de la vie (naissance, exode rural, mariage, mort). Cette forme de segmentation des lignages fait de l'*awo* un groupe de parenté et un sous-lignage.

Dans le cas du lignage M, les différentes maisons lui appartenant se sont divisées de manière à ce que les trois maisons les plus récentes prennent des noms différents de celui du lignage originel. En sont issues deux maisons G, une maison que j'appellerai g1 et une maison g2 et une troisième maison F (f). D'après Shih Chuan-Kang, une sœur quittant une maison pour en fonder une nouvelle peut donner son nom à cette nouvelle maison. Selon Shih par contre, la maison n'est pas une catégorie de l'organisation sociale se confondant plus ou moins avec le *yidu*. Le terme d'*awo* sert seulement à différencier la maison principale (*awo*) des maisons secondaires (*boru*) (2010 : 192). D'après mes propres recherches, le terme de *boru* n'est pas générique car d'autres termes existent pour désigner les maisons secondaires[8]. Il me semble donc hâtif de conclure que le terme *boru* est une catégorie désignant une maison secondaire, rattachée à une maison principale. Par exemple, en 2012, à Lijiazui la maison Apo a fait scission (*zitu*) en raison du trop grand nombre de personnes y résidant. Une seconde maison a été construite qui a également été nommée Apo. Comme la maison principale a gardé le nom d'Apo, on la désigne à présent « Apo *awo* », alors qu'on appelle la seconde maison « Apo *apo* » ce qui signifie littéralement « Apo extérieure » le mot maison étant ellipsé [*Apo awo apo*].

La notion de *yidu* en tant qu'unité sociale organisationnelle (Shih 1993) a été discutée par Hsu comme une catégorie pouvant relever des « sociétés à maison » de Lévi-Strauss (1998 : 75). Hsu a proposé de laisser de côté la question de la matrilinéarité, affirmant qu' « avec les données dont nous disposons, il n'est pas clair que le *sizi* soit un groupe de descendance matrilinéaire ou un groupe de parenté » (Hsu 1998: 84). Selon Hsu, la signification du *yidu* dépasse les caractéristiques notables de la filiation matrilinéaire et font de la société na «une société à maison [*house based-*

7 Pour conserver l'anonymat des maisons, j'utilise la première lettre de celles-ci pour les identifier et une seconde lettre permettant de les distinguer si la première lettre est identique.
8 Une forte variation dialectale s'observe entre les différents villages de cette région, voire même entre locuteurs d'un même village. Ainsi un même terme peut désigner des choses bien différentes.

*society*]». Shih réfute cet argument en raison de l'importance de la matrilinéarité dans la structuration du monde social (2010 : 290-291). Pour Shih, le *yidu* fait que la société na est orientée sur la maisonnée [*household-oriented*] mais sans être un groupe de parenté (1993, 2000, 2010 : 135). Cependant, si on considère que le *yidu* et l'*awo* sont des éléments fondamentaux de l'organisation sociale et que le *yidu* et l'*awo* résultent de la segmentation du lignage, il est logique de considérer le *yidu* et l'*awo* comme des catégories de parenté (ou des sous-lignages). Il parait donc difficile de ne pas considérer la maison comme un élément participant à la structure de la parenté.

Dès lors que l'on observe la vie dans les *awo*, on s'aperçoit que les personnes circulent entre les maisons, que ce soit pour rétablir un équilibre entre genres ou pour recruter de l'aide pour les gros travaux. En effet, des personnes sans liens généalogiques proches ou directs avec une maison peuvent aussi y résider lorsqu'elles y sont recrutées ou par adoption ou par captation de partenaires sexuels. Shih a bien remarqué que ces captations de partenaires sont possibles (2010 : 141), mais il ne les considère pas comme des éléments significatifs de la structuration de l'organisation sociale ou de la parenté. Malgré un mode de filiation matrilinéaire, une maison peut recruter un membre féminin extérieur à la lignée en captant une partenaire sexuelle (*tchumi ché* litt. « Partenaire sexuelle de l'homme » « prendre ») – à condition que la maison donneuse n'en souffre pas et puisse assurer sa propre continuité. À l'inverse, les pratiques de captation de partenaires sexuels masculins se nomment *zoma ché* (litt. « beau-fils » « prendre »). Moins courantes, elles visent généralement à rééquilibrer une balance entre genres quand la proportion d'hommes et de femmes dans une maison est inadéquate pour effectuer les gros travaux. L'adoption temporaire ou définitive de jeunes enfants issus d'un même lignage peut également pallier à un manque générationnel de main d'œuvre ou assurer la continuité de la maison. Ces pratiques dépendent de la configuration de la maison et de sa capacité à se débrouiller au moins temporairement en faisant appel à son réseau d'entraide.

Suivant l'étendue de ses réseaux, une maison peut se permettre de se passer des stratégies d'adoption ou de captation. Ces stratégies ont en effet des conséquences, car un fois mise en place, l'appartenance à la maison devient synonyme de la parenté vécue au quotidien. Les « gens de la maison » (*awo hing*) comprennent ainsi parfois des personnes n'appartenant pas au même matrilignage, mais s'intégrant à celui-ci par le partage de la vie de tous les jours et de ses rituels, notamment celui de la vénération des ancêtres. Une femme qui est « captée » par une maison pour en assurer la continuité, vénère à la fois les ancêtres de son lignage d'origine et ceux de son nouveau lignage. De plus, lorsque qu'on décrit le fonctionnement de l'entraide, il est impossible de mettre de côté la structuration matrilinéaire du monde social, car les réciprocités entre maisons s'organisent sur la base de relations préférentielles: d'abord avec les maisons du même *sizi*, puis avec les voisins et les *hrantchouba*. L'observation des activités de tous les jours, dans les maisons, met également en lumière des divergences possibles à l'idéal matrilinéaire, divergences entraînées par le recrutement de personnes étrangères au lignage. Par contre, le recours à l'entraide apporte d'autres solutions au lignage. L'ethnographie de l'entraide offre de nouvelles pistes pour comprendre comment la matrilinéarité opère - en tant que constituant moral et normatif - pour structurer la reproduction sociale, et pour définir les principes d'après lesquels les réalités sociales sont vécues dans les maisons.

**L'entraide institutionnalisée**

Suivant la conception na de la prospérité, l'ensemble du *yidu* doit contribuer à la richesse de la maison (Shih 2010 : 175). L'expression « *gragra zidu hy* » exprime ainsi la nécessité de faire (*hy*) l'entraide (*gragra*[9]) dans la famille (*zidu*). L'idée de prospérité évoquée ici n'est ni monétaire ni économique. La prospérité d'une maison s'exprime par divers moyens, comme la possession du bétail qui est utilisé principalement pour le travail agricole, le transport de fardeaux ou parfois la production du lait. Elle s'exprime également par le nombre de personnes résidant dans les maisons. Une maison constituée de plus d'une dizaine de membres dispose ainsi d'une main d'œuvre suffisante pour vaquer aux tâches quotidiennes. Lorsqu'une maison s'engage dans des travaux d'ampleur telle la coupe du bois, une construction ou de gros travaux agricoles, elle sollicite généralement une ou plusieurs autres maisons pour lui venir en aide. Les réseaux d'entraide ainsi mobilisés varient selon le type de travail à mener, les disponibilités des membres de la maison demandant de l'aide, et de la situation des maisons sollicitées. Ce sont d'abord des maisons appartenant au même *sizi* qui s'entraident, puis des maisons voisines, et en dernier temps des maisons liées par le partenariat sexuel d'une ou d'un de leurs membres. En fonction de ses propres besoins, une maison prêteuse désigne un ou plusieurs de ses membres pour « aller aider (les gens » (*hinggra bizé*) d'autres maisons. Lorsque les maisons prêteuses se trouvent à leur tour dans le besoin, l'aide doit pouvoir leur être rendue (*lehogra* « rendre l'aide »).

Ce fonctionnement, comme pour beaucoup de sociétés encore largement orientées vers une économie de subsistance, met en évidence une organisation sociale des travaux agricoles sur la base « de relations d'entraide mobilisant les membres de plusieurs unités de production – voisins, parents ou alliés –, voire l'ensemble de la communauté villageoise » (voir Sabourin 2007 :198, 2012, voir également Sahlins 2011). Nombre d'études sur l'entraide attestent la présence de ces modalités dans les sociétés de l'Asie du Sud-Est et de l'Asie Orientale (Condominas 1974, Lubeigt 1974, Cheng [1980] 2003, Yan 1996, Aubert et coll. 2002, Pannier 2015). Gough a observé que les sociétés matrilinéaires s'organisent habituellement autour d'une aide mutuelle entre unités résidentielles (1974 : 545-548). L'entraide est « nécessaire à la production et à la survie » (Sabourin 2011 : 2), elle se caractérise par une logique économique d'enchâssement[10] dans des relations sociales plus larges (Polanyi 1983) et est guidée par un système de valeurs explicite.
Chez les Na, la mobilisation par chaque maison d'un réseau d'entraide pour effectuer les gros travaux exprime un esprit de solidarité, qui d'après Lamu (une femme de la maison g1 que nous retrouverons plus loin) émane des périodes de disettes que les Na ont vécu par le passé. Ses mots, recueillis le jour de l'an 2014, traduisent ce que les villageois de Lijiazui disent sur l'entraide :

> *« Lorsque l'on échange (khrakhra) du gras de porc pour kushe[11] et que l'on est invité à manger dans les maisons, c'est pour que l'on se rappelle des périodes où on avait faim. Ça rappelle que l'on doit s'entraider (gragra). »*

9 Le terme « gra » signifie l'aide et le redoublement du terme signifie l'entraide.
10 Il est important de noter que l'opposition entre un système d'économie enchâssé et un système d'économie désenchâssé relève de types idéaux Polanyi soutient en outre qu'une économie désenchâssée est une utopie. Il décrit plus une tension, ou deux économies morales différentes qu'une forme rigide (voir la préface de Stiglitz à l'édition 2001 - Polanyi 2001).
11 Pendant les huit jours qui suivent le Nouvel An, les Na s'invitent entre maisonnées parentes pour Xiaoluoshui et Lijiazui et plus spécifiquement entre générations pour Lijiazui (les anciens le premier jour, puis les générations suivantes les autres jours). C'est l'occasion d'échanger des victuailles et notamment du gras de porc ou des morceaux du porc qui vient d'être abattu.

Ce commentaire a été livré lors des préparatifs de petits sacs contenant du porc séché et d'autres victuailles destinées à toutes les maisons dont les membres viendraient visiter la maison de Lamu. Il permet de souligner combien « le manque » constitue une préoccupation première dans la vie sociale chez les Na. Les pratiques d'échange (*khrakhra*) et d'entraide (*gragra*) qui sont mises ici en correspondance, sont ainsi présentées comme relevant d'un intérêt commun et d'un souci pour l'autre. La solidarité dont font preuve les Na en échangeant et en s'entraidant correspond en ce sens à ce que Scott nomme une « éthique de la subsistance » (1976 : 3) et ce que d'autres appellent une « économie morale » (Thompson 1971, 1991, Fassin 2009, 2012 et Eideliman 201, voir également, sur l'entraide, Hyden 2006).

D'après Scott (1976), l'économie morale des paysans s'appuie généralement sur des éléments du raisonnement populaire constitués par des valeurs et des normes en lien avec leur environnement, leur organisation économique et politique, leurs pratiques agricoles, la structure de leurs maisons et de la parenté[12]. Scott a montré en particulier que l'économie morale des paysans est faite de « modèles de réciprocité, générosité obligée, communalité des terres, et partage du travail, pour permettre d'égaliser les inévitables creux dans les ressources d'une famille qui, autrement, auraient pu les faire chuter » (1976: 3). L'entraide relève à ce titre d'une forme de politique de tous les jours (*everyday politics*) qui permet d'organiser la production de biens et les pratiques de distribution dans les maisons et dans les communautés (Kerkvliet 2009: 232). L'entraide est d'ailleurs souvent décrite comme « une forme de coopération, d'organisation du travail qui relève de la réciprocité ou de la solidarité dans la production » (Sabourin 2011 : 3). La coopération se définit comme une participation à une œuvre commune. Cette perspective permet d'envisager que la régularité et la centralité des réseaux d'entraide puissent être d'une importance majeure dans l'organisation sociale et dans la manière dont les Na envisagent la communauté villageoise.

L'entraide suppose « l'obligation de rendre » l'aide apportée (*lehogra*), une valeur dont Mauss (1923-1924) a fait la pierre angulaire de son analyse du don/contre-don. En partant de l'analyse de dons réciproques, Mauss différencie la réciprocité directe impliquant, d'une part, des prestations matérielles ou symboliques entre deux parties et, d'autre part, la réciprocité indirecte pouvant bénéficier à un tiers et qui intervient après un certain temps. La réciprocité indirecte n'est pas une contre-prestation forcément immédiate et symétrique. Mauss envisage la réciprocité comme l'a proposé Malinowski. Dans la perspective fonctionnaliste de Malinowski (1933), la réciprocité peut être décrite comme une complémentarité économique donnant lieu à des dons mutuels de vivres entre des groupes de parenté ou encore des groupes domestiques ; à partir de cette complémentarité se constituent des chaînes de transactions permettant que l'équivalence ou l'équilibre satisfassent les parties (Malinowski 1933 : 23). Pour Mauss et Malinowski, la réciprocité fonde la structure sociale si bien que les valeurs morales de la réciprocité pré-existent à la structure sociale.

Le principal intérêt du terme de réciprocité plutôt que d'échange dans le contexte de l'entraide na est qu'il met en lumière l'idée que l'obligation de rendre et les valeurs éthiques engendrées par la relation fournissent la matrice d'une dette indéfiniment renouvelée. L'importante synthèse réalisée par Sabourin au sujet de la réciprocité (2012) souligne que celle-ci met en scène des sujets et une

12 Je laisse volontairement de côté une analyse des formes économiques du marché, bien que dans chaque maison il y ait des travailleurs ramenant de maigres revenus. Par-là, je ne cherche pas à dire que l'économie rurale est auto-suffisante et unitaire, ni qu'elle n'est pas traversée par des conflits provenant des rapports de parenté, des rapports sociaux de sexe ou encore des différences de richesse, entre autres (voir Blumenfield et coll. 2018). Le but ici est de montrer les logiques du système de coopération.

relation qui s'établit en retour, alors que l'échange implique des objets et matérialise une logique d'intérêt personnel. Appliqué à une analyse économico-politique telle que l'a proposé Polanyi, l'entraide correspond à une économie empirique institutionnalisée, et donc à un ensemble de règles. Dans le contexte na, l'entraide correspond à un système économique enchâssé dans des relations sociales qui vont en s'élargissant, et dont les règles sont mises en action par des unités résidentielles entretenant des interactions réciproques. Polanyi considère trois formes d'intégration économique: la réciprocité[13], la redistribution et le marché (l'échange marchand). Il souligne que la réciprocité « peut utiliser la redistribution ainsi que l'échange comme méthodes subordonnées » (Polanyi 2017a). Si on prend en compte que le principe domestique (*householding*) est aussi une forme d'intégration économique, cette approche permet d'envisager l'entraide chez les Na comme un système de coopération établi par des relations réciproques entre maisons.

Prolongeant l'approche de Polanyi, Sahlins (1965, 2011) a souligné le lien entre réciprocité et redistribution en proposant de considérer le « mode de production domestique » comme contexte de la gestion des moyens de subsistance des économies enchâssées. Sahlins suggère que les logiques de l'échange non-marchand permettent de penser que la réciprocité suit une logique d'intégration économique qui fait de l'espace domestique le lieu de production et de redistribution[14] économique (1965 :140, 2011). Il écrit en outre qu'un « coefficient de sociabilité » est inhérent aux pratiques d'échanges (2011 : 296). À mesure que l'on s'éloigne de la « maisonnée », la réciprocité va en s'amenuisant, d'une réciprocité généralisée, à une réciprocité plus restreinte puis négative (Sahlins 1972 : 152-153). Sahlins définit ce continuum en montrant les valeurs éthiques qui font de « la réciprocité généralisée, le pôle de solidarité maximale ; la réciprocité équilibrée, le point médian ; enfin la réciprocité négative, le pôle de non-sociabilité maximale » (Sahlins 2011 *:* 243-244*)*.

La participation de l'ensemble du village de Lijiazui à ces réseaux d'entraide montre une interdépendance et une complémentarité, entre maisons, qui sont nécessaires à la production. Les relations réciproques entretenues par les maisons ne sont pas obligatoirement symétriques et de même nature, elles informent plutôt une structure nécessitant plusieurs partenaires. Ces partenaires constituent un réseau dans lequel l'obligation de rendre actualise sans cesse les relations sociales. Sabourin a d'ailleurs souligné que l'entraide n'exige pas le retour « obligatoire en termes contractuels ou dans l'absolu», mais que le retour est « attendu en termes de sociabilité et d'humanité » (2011 : 3). Comme mentionné précédemment, ce sont d'abord les maisons appartenant à un même matrilignage (*sizi)* qui structurent et maintiennent leurs relations par le biais de cette coopération. Puis, viennent les voisins et les amis. Il faut ainsi noter qu'en retour, les transferts non marchands influencent toutes ces relations. Ils les activent, les pérennisent ou encore les amènent à être reconnues. La réciprocité positive va de pair avec le fait que le partage et la générosité figurent comme des valeurs essentielles chez les Na. Il est par ailleurs courant d'utiliser l'expression de partage équitable (*taniénié lebeubeu*) dès qu'il s'agit de redistribuer quelque chose. La régularité et la centralité de ces relations d'entraide entre groupes suggèrent également que l'essentiel est en fait de reproduire l'entraide.

13 Il pense la réciprocité comme établissant un lien social d'implication positive et donc liée à des valeurs tels l'amitié, la confiance, le prestige etc. plutôt que négative tel la vendetta, etc.
14 L'article ne décrit pas les formes d'échanges rituels ou cérémoniels qui participent de la redistribution. Toutefois, ces éléments évoqués permettent de considérer que chaque maison par ces pratiques d'échanges non-marchand (*khrakhra*) sont le centre par lequel l'excédent peut être redistribué pour notamment entretenir les liens sociaux.

Dans son étude des sociétés paysannes des Suds, Sabourin écrit que la génération de « valeurs éthiques, telles l' amitié, la confiance, la responsabilité, l' équité, le prestige, et l' honneur (…) sont à la base de la reproduction du lien social» (Sabourin 2012 :160). Sabourin montre que l'entraide est « irréductible à l'échange de biens ou de services qui libère du lien social ou de la dette » (Sabourin 2011 : 3). L'échange et notamment l'échange marchand, dit-il, est impersonnel et engage un échange d'objets dans un acte final, alors que la réciprocité est intersubjective et engage justement la reproduction de l'acte nécessaire à la création et la réactualisation de valeurs. Ces valeurs « sont construites, socialement et politiquement, dans la mesure où elles sont engendrées et reproduites par certaines formes de réciprocité » (Sabourin 2012 :160). Pour Testart, l'amitié est « la raison et la condition même» de l'échange non-marchand (Testart 2001 : 726) ce que Sahlins résume joliment quand il écrit: « si les amis font des cadeaux, les cadeaux font des amis » (2011 : 298). L'amitié en tant que valeur fondamentale permet de penser l'entraide chez les Na comme une relation qui structure et réactualise en permanence les rapports entre maisons. La dette éternellement renouvelée doit ainsi être pensée comme la matrice de la socialité na.

La circulation de personnes visant à assurer la continuité et la prospérité des maisons affiche un souci de l'autre menant à une configuration généralisée de la réciprocité. Les coopérations entretenues sur la base de relations réciproques mettent en lumière un système économique enchâssé dans des relations plus larges, de manière à ce que les aspects sociaux, politiques et moraux participent des relations et pratiques économiques. De plus, la régularité des réciprocités entretenues entre maisons met en évidence les relations centripètes et centrifuges qui se jouent à partir de l'unité résidentielle. Étendue à l'ensemble du village à travers les réseaux de parenté, la réciprocité invite ainsi à voir l'entraide comme une institution (Polanyi) aussi bien qu' un fait social total (Mauss). C'est du moins ce que suggère l'ethnographie de ces pratiques, à différentes échelles et en premier lieu dans les maisons. L'organisation du travail dans celles-ci, la façon dont elles initient les diverses formes d'entraide, et le rôle central des *dabu*, les cheffes de maisons, offrent une première lecture des logiques économiques des maisons.

### « S'occuper de la maison » (*awo zidu ji*) et « faire l'entraide dans la famille » (*Gragra zidu hy*)

À Lijiazui, les Na racontent que chaque maison a reçu un nombre de terres mesurées en *mu* (unité de mesure égale à 1/15$^{ème}$ d'hectare) proportionné au nombre de personnes résidant sous le même toit. Plus une maison est grande, plus elle dispose de terres. Lorsqu'une maison est trop grande, elle scissionne et l'une des sœurs s'établit dans une nouvelle maison avec ses enfants et possiblement d'autre membres de la maison principale. Il s'opère alors une division des terres proportionnelle au nombre de personnes dans chaque maison[15]. La culture du maïs, de l'orge, des pommes de terre et des haricots constitue la principale source de production agricole. Très peu de denrées alimentaires sont achetées au marché de Yongning. Les Na s'y procurent seulement le riz, le thé et l'alcool. Dans le village, quatre petites échoppes gérées chacune par une maison du village achètent des biens et des vivres supplémentaires pour les revendre en cas de nécessité. Le mode de production est donc essentiellement tourné vers la subsistance et il s'organise dans l'espace domestique (voir Sahlins 2011 : 116-185).

Les gens d'une même maison (*awo hing*) partagent et consomment en commun les ressources pour lesquelles ils ont travaillé ensemble. Les tâches quotidiennes sont généralement réparties en

15 Cette division est ensuite validée par le gouvernement local.

fonction de l'âge et du sexe (Weng 1993, Walsh 2001 : 159-162). Les cheffes de maison, les *dabu*[16], gèrent chaque jour les tâches domestiques, et y participent. Elles doivent « s'occuper de la maison » (*awo yi*[17]), et ce sont elles qui répartissent les activités liées à la maison (travail des champs, pâturage des animaux) entre les membres selon leur sexe et leur âge. Si les affaires de la maison sont toujours gérées par la *dabu*, tous les membres adultes – donc la génération des frères et sœurs de la *dabu* (*mwamenimi*)[18] – sont associés aux prises de décision, notamment pour les grands travaux. Les activités routinières n'ont pas besoin d'être discutées car chacun connaît son rôle. La gestion des tâches domestiques vise à assurer la prospérité de la maison en « faisant l'entraide dans le *zidu* » (*gragra zidu hy*). Cette expression place non seulement l'espace domestique au centre de la vie sociale, mais elle exprime également l'idée d'un tissu relationnel unissant tous les gens de la maison.

L'observation de la division sexuelle du travail montre que les femmes effectuent la plupart des tâches ménagères et agricoles. Les hommes viennent prêter main forte pour les gros travaux et gèrent diverses activités économiques en dehors du village. Cette division du travail n'est cependant pas donnée une fois pour toutes (Shih 2010 : 233). Elle est « flexible et s'adapte facilement aux changements dans la composition de la main-d'œuvre disponible » (Mattison 2010 : 162). Dans les faits, la division est en effet moins genrée que hiérarchisée selon l'âge. Les tâches domestiques comme la cuisine et le soin des enfants ou les travaux d'envergure comme l'exploitation forestière ou la construction de maisons peuvent être effectués par des hommes ou des femmes. Selon la saison, les membres des maisons remplissent plusieurs rôles. La participation de tous les membres en âge adulte est généralement requise pour les travaux qui concernent directement la maison, c'est à dire pour les tâches nécessaires à la consommation et à la production d'un léger surplus, ce dernier étant destiné aux échanges entre maisons lors de cérémonies (voir Sahlins 2011 : 179-217).

En 2013 Zhuoma Lamu[19] était la *dabu* de la maison g1 appartenant au matrilignage M (*sizi* M)[20], qui était alors composée de dix membres. Ama, la mère de Zhuoma Lamu, avait fondé cette maison plus de vingt ans auparavant, après avoir quitté la maison M principale avec ses six enfants. Le nom de la maison avait alors changé pour devenir la maison g1. Son fils ainé, Pincuo, était parti à son tour de cette maison dans les années 2000 pour s'établir à Muli avec sa femme[21]. Cinq de ses six enfants résidaient donc en 2013 dans cette maison, trois filles et deux garçons de la génération des *mwamenimi* ( les frères et sœurs) : Dashi, le deuxième frère et *daba* (ritualiste) en titre, Zhuoma Lamu, la *dabu*, ses deux sœurs Latcuo et Erche Namu, et Aka le cadet. Chaque sœur a eu deux enfants. Zhuoma Lamu a donné sa première fille, Naka, à son frère ainé qui ne pouvait pas avoir d'enfant, et a eu un fils, Erche. Latcuo a eu une première fille, Binma, d'un partenaire décédé (Binma est partie vivre vers le lac Lugu) et une seconde fille, Sona Lamu, d'un autre partenaire.

16 Les *dabu* sont la plupart du temps des femmes en raison du système matrilinéaire, mais peuvent dans certaines circonstances être des hommes.
17 Se dit également *awo zidu ji*.. La différence entre les deux expressions réside dans le fait que seule la dabu s'occupe des affaires de la maison et répartit les tâches *(awo yi)*, mais que tout le monde participe, au sens où toute la famille (*zidu*) s'occupe (*ji*) de la maison (*awo*) (*awo zidu ji*).
18 Ce processus décisionnel indique que c'est le couple frère/sœur, étendu à toute la génération frères/sœurs (*mwame nimi*) qui est au cœur de la maison, et non pas la relation d'alliance (voir Lévi-Strauss 1979 : 177, 1984 : 189-220, 1991)
19 Tous les prénoms utilisés ont été changés, afin de préserver l'anonymat.
20 La maison g1 porte un nom différend du matrilignage M en raison d'une division (*zitu*). Deux maisons portent le nom g et se divisent en maison g1 et g2 en fonction de leur situation géographique dans le village.
21 D'un autre groupe minoritaire.

Erche Namu a eu une fille, Ake Dama, de l'âge de Sona Lamu, et un fils, Duzhi. Quatre des six enfants de la génération *zo-muzo* résidaient donc dans la maison.

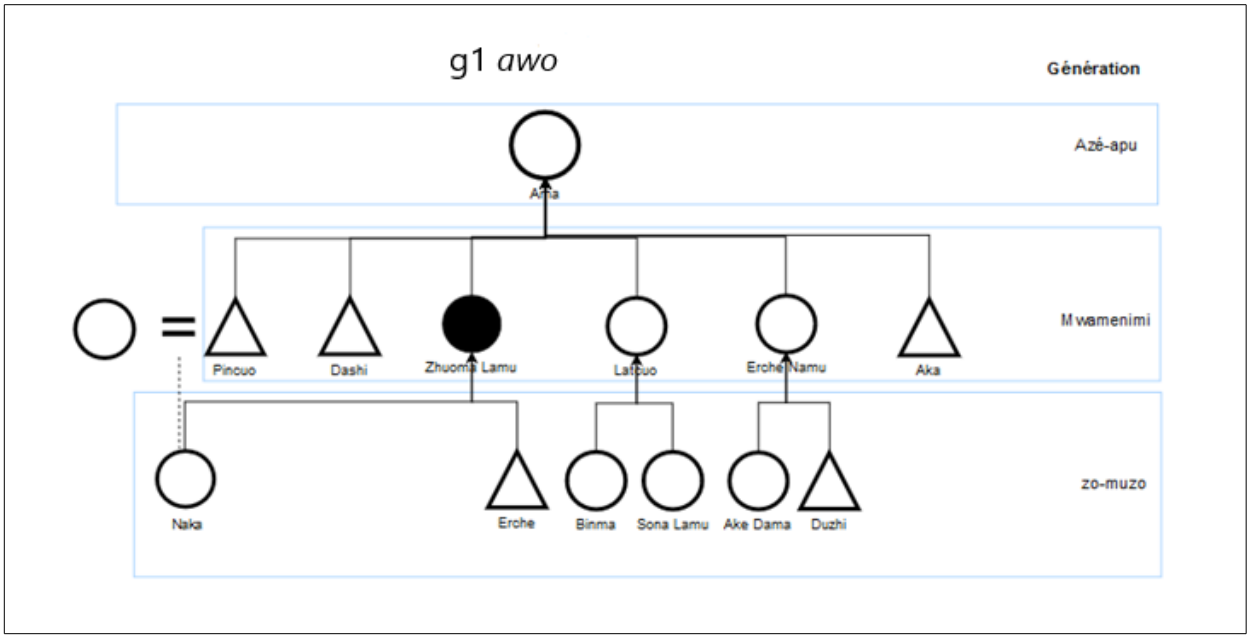


*Image 1: Diagramme de parenté de la maison g1 de Lijiazui en 2013.*

La composition de la maison était suffisante pour l'accomplissement des tâches quotidiennes. La génération des *mwamenimi* (frères-sœurs) pouvait compter sur les sœurs de la *dabu* pour effectuer la plupart des travaux. Latcuo et Erche Namu s'occupaient le plus souvent de la récolte et de la plantation. Elles effectuaient également les tâches lourdes si nécessaire, mais pouvaient compter sur Aka leur frère cadet bien que ce dernier fût souvent sollicité par d'autres maisons pour aider aux soins vétérinaires. Aka avait en effet acquis une formation en soins infirmiers. Dans la maison g1, Aka était chargé des travaux les plus lourds comme la coupe du bois, et participait souvent aux travaux agricoles. Dashi, l'oncle responsable des rituels *daba* devait conduire les rituels pour sa propre maison mais aussi parfois pour d'autres maisons. Cette charge religieuse l'empêchait alors de faire paître le bétail (*hrgele bizé*), sa charge habituelle.

La maison g1 pouvait également compter sur Sona Lamu et Ake Dama, toutes deux alors âgées de 13 ans. Si elles pouvaient prêter main-forte pour différentes tâches, les deux filles souhaitaient continuer leurs études.  Des discussions ont alors eu lieu au sein de la maison. Certains membres qui se plaignaient de leur vieillesse et de ne plus pouvoir effectuer certains travaux, se demandaient laquelle des deux filles devait poursuivre des études et laquelle devait être éduquée à la succession du rôle de *dabu*. En l'absence d'une décision, les deux jeunes filles ont été invitées à rester à la maison après l'école primaire pour faire paître les porcs et accomplir des tâches quotidiennes comme nourrir les animaux. Puis, au terme des discussions entre les membres de la maison, elles ont ensuite été inscrites toutes les deux au collège. L'ainé des garçons était quant à lui en étude à l'école secondaire de Muli, et le plus jeune restait à la maison en raison de la possibilité d'effectuer les trois premières années de l'école primaire au village. Cette configuration permettait néanmoins de compter sur les fils et filles (*zo-muzo*) pour accomplir les tâches quotidiennes lors des vacances scolaires.

Dix ans auparavant, les adolescents de la maison n'étaient pas en âge d'aider aux travaux ; en fait, le benjamin de la génération de la *dabu* était encore à l'école. Les gens de la maison g1 ont donc demandé en 2003 à une maison (m3) du même matrilignage (M) de leur prêter l'un de leurs membres jusqu'à ce que leurs propres enfants soient assez grands pour assumer le travail de la maison. En échange, le jeune garçon, Erche, qui fut intégré à la maison g1 entre l' âge de dix et quinze ans, a suivi l'apprentissage daba auprès de Dashi, le second frère de la maison[22]. Pour Zhuoma Lamu, la *dabu*, l'adoption d'un enfant n'avait pas à être définitive puisque leurs propres enfants allaient grandir. Par contre, puisque Pincuo, le frère aîné de Zhuoma Lamu n'avait pas, comme déjà mentionné, la possibilité d'avoir des enfants en raison d'une infertilité au sein du couple, Zhuoma Lamu lui avait donné sa fille aînée, Naka, dès lors que d'autres filles furent nées dans la maison.

Ces exemples illustrent la capacité des « gens de la maison » à s'adapter aux circonstances de la vie pour assurer la reproduction sociale et biologique du groupe domestique. Les choix successifs de la maison de Zhuoma Lamu sont complètement liés à la continuité et la prospérité de sa maison. Les stratégies déployées reflètent une préférence marquée pour l'adoption entre gens du même os. Toutefois, si ces stratégies ne sont pas possibles, il est possible pour une maison de recruter soit une *tchumi* soit un gendre pour combler un déficit en genre. Prendre *tchumi*, a pour but la reproduction des personnes et donc de la vie même. Ces femmes assument alors le rôle de 'celles qui s'occupent de la maison' (*awo yi*), mais elles ne deviennent pas toujours *dabu*. La division sexuelle et générationnelle du travail ainsi que l'adoption temporaire d'un enfant d'une maison différente, mais du même *sizi*, illustrent combien les relations de parenté couplées aux conditions économiques d'une maison déterminent un ensemble de processus : la production, la reproduction biologique, sociale, économique, la consommation, les rituels et la socialisation (Guo 1996 : 188-189, Weng 2007 : 418).

Plutôt que de centrer le propos uniquement sur l'idéal matrilinéaire, tel que le propose Shih (2000, 2010,) et donc de se limiter aux stratégies favorisant l'harmonie du *yidu* (la pratique des visites nocturnes, les divisions de maisons trop nombreuses ou les valeurs liées à la transmission matrilinéaire), une perspective holiste ouvre l'étude des faits de parenté sur le vécu. L'état des relations pourrait être mieux compris dans un cadre analytique comme celui de l'oïkonomia (De L'Estoile 2014, 2016, 2017). Cette notion que l'on doit à Aristote et qui a principalement été lue sous la forme de l'économie domestique (voir Polanyi 2017b) gagne à être comprise comme un « gouvernement de la maison » (De L'Estoile 2014, 2016, 2017). Cette perspective permet de considérer la notion d'oïkonomia comme un outil ethnographique permettant de dépasser une lecture strictement économique et de considérer l'enchâssement de l'économique dans des relations sociales plus large afin de lire par exemple les dimensions politiques, morales et affectives qui permettent de « maintenir la maison » et « d'assurer la vie » ou de « vivre une bonne vie » (De L'Estoile 2014, 2016, 2017).

La notion d'oïkonomia permet de regarder la conception indigène na de maison (*awo*) comme une unité sociale de vie et de décision et donc le maillage premier du monde social. (Alors que Shih comprend plutôt ce maillage social comme un idéal « harmonieux » (*harmonious*) ou le fait de « bien s'entendre » (*getting along well*) dans le strict domaine de la parenté, c'est-à-dire au sein du

22 Il y a treize *daba* à Lijiazui et trente-six maisons. Pour chaque maison au moins un membre a suivi un enseignement daba afin d'assister les *daba* venant officier pour les rituels de protections des maisons ou d'autres rituels.

*yidu.)* L'exercice d'un contrôle politico-moral et les décisions prises par la dabu en concertation avec l'ensemble des résidents sur toutes les affaires de la maison, encadrent ainsi l'organisation du travail de production, de la consommation, et des relations avec les autres maisons permettant alors « d'assurer la vie » ou de « vivre une bonne vie »[23].
Chaque maison engage dans la mesure du nombre de personnes disponibles des relations d'entraide pour divers travaux nécessaires à une autre maison. « Aller aider les gens » (*hinggra bizé*) témoigne d'un soucis de solidarité face aux moyens de subsistance. La réciprocité engagée dans les relations d'entraide permet à toute maison de produire de quoi consommer et échanger avec les autres maisons lors des rituels et cérémonies diverses. En 2013, en tenant compte du nombre de personnes disponibles pour effectuer les tâches quotidiennes, la maison de Zhuoma Lamu pouvait raisonnablement diligenter plusieurs personnes pour « aller aider ».

**Aller aider les gens (*hinggra bizé*)**
Latcuo, la seconde sœur, et Aka, le plus jeune des frères de la maison de Zhuoma Lamu, aidaient souvent d'autres maisons pour les travaux agricoles. Que ce soit lorsque leur maison avait besoin d'aide ou lorsque des travaux agricoles étaient menés par d'autres maisons du même lignage, une forme de solidarité se perpétuait. En 2013, plusieurs épisodes de coopération ont été organisés avec le *sizi* M, y compris un épisode pour la récolte (*badje*) de l'orge. La mère de Zhuoma Lamu est issue de ce *sizi* M. et elle est née dans la maison principale m1[24] . Les six maisons directement liées à ce matrilignage (*sizi* M) – dont les maisons m (car portant le même nom), ainsi qu'une maison F et les deux maisons G, dont celle des g1, s'entraident régulièrement pour ce type de travaux[25].

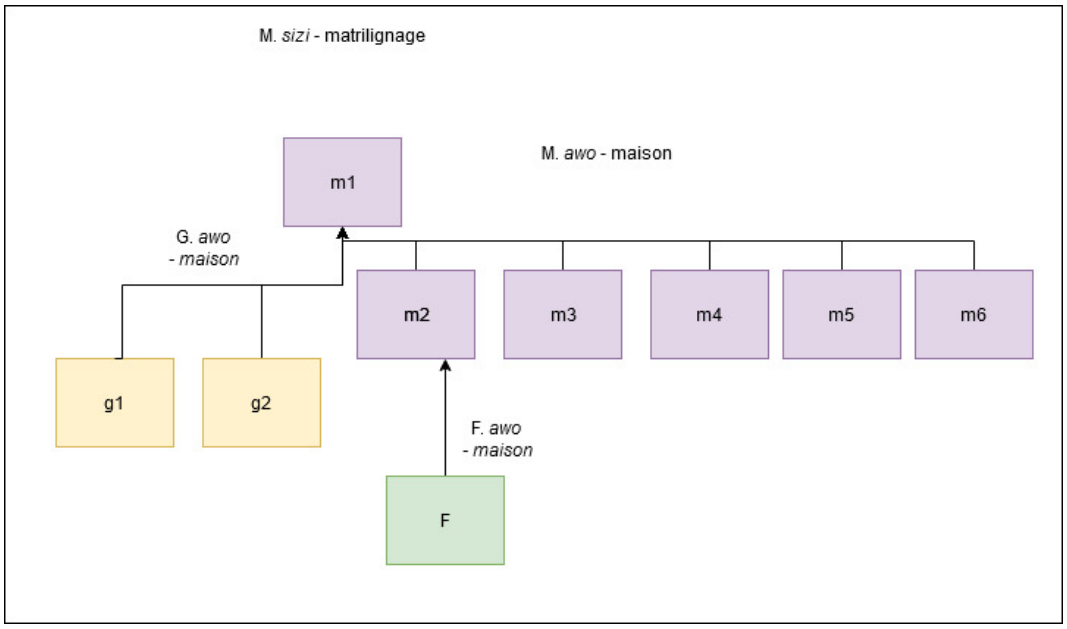

*Image 2: Diagramme du lignage M. auquel appartiennent six maisons M, deux maisons G et une maison F en 2013.*

23 En somme ce n'est pas un ordre ou une logique économique qui encadre les pratiques, mais un ensemble politico-moral visant à la continuité de la vie elle-même.
24 Le *sizi* M. est un matrilignage pour lequel, six maisons portent le même nom que le *sizi*. Trois autres maisons portent un nom différent
25 L'appartenance à ce même *sizi* pour ces maisons, outre qu'elle est visible à travers les récits généalogiques, est particulièrement visible lors de diverses cérémonies notamment celles visant à honorer les ancêtres.

La récolte, les semailles, et la construction des maisons sont déterminées en fonction du calendrier luni-solaire na (qui n'est autre que le calendrier luni-solaire chinois), et elles ne peuvent donc s'organiser qu'en des temps déterminés et prévisibles à l'avance. Par exemple, lorsque toutes les maisons amorcent les travaux de récolte, elles se concertent pour savoir dans quel ordre les maisons recevront de l'aide. Chaque jour pendant deux semaines, toutes les maisons du *sizi* M se sont rencontrées pour s'entraider en fonction de la maturité des récoltes. Certaines maisons du *sizi* M ont un grand nombre de personnes disponibles pour effectuer les travaux (entre six et quinze membres). Elles peuvent ainsi fournir de l'aide à d'autres maisons dont les besoins sont importants. Lorsque ces maisons ont moins de membres, et manquent d'adultes, d'hommes ou de femmes, pour effectuer les travaux d'envergure, l'entraide permet de corriger toute disproportion dans la main d'œuvre disponible pour effectuer les gros travaux.

Comme expliqué ci-dessus, des stratégies d'adoption temporaire d'un enfant du même *sizi* ou la captation d'un partenaire sexuel peuvent être mises en place par les membres de certaines maisons. Mais d'autres maisons (souvent celles qui sont constituées principalement de femmes peuvent choisir de rester entre « gens du même os ». Ces maisons se tournent alors vers l'entraide pour assurer la gestion de leurs moyens de subsistance, et leur prospérité. En fonction de l'équilibre recherché en genre ou en nombre, elles font appel aux *hrantchouba* des femmes pour accomplir le travail. Loin d'être anecdotique, ce type d'aide a été observé par Shih (2000 : 701, 2010: 3, 77, 162) et  Walsh (2001 : 159-162).

En 2013, une des maisons M du village, la maison m4, était ainsi presque exclusivement constituée de femmes. Naka Zhuoma, la *dabu*, avait alors une cinquantaine d'années. Elle avait deux filles, dont l'une avait aussi deux filles: Dashi Latcuo, alors âgée de dix-sept ans et Pincuo Zhuoma de quatorze ans. Binma la sœur cadette de Naka Zhuoma avait également deux enfants une fille et un garçon. Ils n'avaient respectivement que trois ans et un an. Erche, l'oncle de Naka Zhuoma avait plus de soixante-dix ans et ne pouvait plus gérer les tâches difficiles qui lui étaient auparavant assignées. Il se chargeait parfois du pâturage des vaches (*hrgele bizé*), mais passait la majeure partie de son temps à rendre visite à ses amis au village. La configuration de la maison était ainsi à la fois totalement matrilinéaire, et presque totalement féminine, en ce qui concerne les adultes. En 2013, lorsque je l'ai interrogée sur la façon dont les membres de sa maison s'organisaient pour les travaux des champs, Naka Zhuoma m'a expliqué qu'elle demandait de l'aide au *hrantchouba* de sa sœur. Comme ce dernier vivait dans une grande maison, la main d'œuvre n'y manquait pas, et il pouvait aider la maison de sa *tchumi* :

> *« Si nous en avons besoin, nous leur demandons de venir nous aider. Si leur maison n'a pas besoin d'eux, ils viennent nous aider. Nous aurons bientôt un homme à la maison (le garçon d'un an…). Quand il sera plus âgé, il nous aidera pour le travail (pâturage d'animaux puis travail plus important). »*

Les gens de cette maison n'avaient pas suffisamment de main d'œuvre disponible pour travailler les champs lors de la récolte ou de la plantation, mais l'entraide suffisait à répondre à leurs besoins. Les explications données par la *dabu* ont aussi démontré que l'organisation du travail dans la maison était pensée sur le long terme. Aucune stratégie d'adoption ou de captation de partenaires sexuels n'avait été mise en place dans l'immédiat puisque la contribution des maisons du même *sizi* M et des *hrantchouba* étaient suffisantes.

Le système d'entraide diffère sensiblement lorsqu'il s'agit de travaux de construction de maisons (*zhi kruakrua*). Ce travail concerne le village entier (Shih 2010 : 192). Ainsi, en plus des aides venant de maisons du même matrilignage et des *hrantchouba*, ce sont toutes les maisons du village qui s'investissent à des degrés divers. Les voisins effectuent généralement les travaux en raison de dettes d'aide se prolongeant indéfiniment. Un esprit de solidarité anime ces travaux. Toute maison en construction sait qu'elle pourra compter d'une manière ou d'une autre sur les réseaux de l'entraide. Une grande maison peut alors compter sur une dizaine de travailleurs en plus des trois ou quatre frères et sœurs qu'elle abrite pour mener ces travaux. Certains moments de la construction, comme le relevage des façades de la charpente, demandent parfois plus d'une cinquantaine de travailleurs.

Un soir de novembre 2013, alors que trois maisons de Lijiazui étaient en construction, la *dabu* de la maison où je résidais m'a expliqué que plusieurs des membres de la maison allaient aider les gens à la construction des maisons en question « *Niaskou zikrua krua hing gra bizé* ». Elle m'a demandé si je souhaitais apporter mon aide à la construction de l'une d'elles. Leur maison n'était apparentée qu'à une seule de ces maisons, par le *sizi*. La seconde sœur a été envoyée dans cette maison-là pour aider à la préparation des collations de la journée. Le troisième frère de la maison a été envoyé dans une seconde maison pour aider à la construction des fondations, alors que j'étais envoyée dans la troisième maison. L'ensemble des maisons du village avait réparti des travailleurs dans les trois maisons en construction. En une quinzaine de jours environ, trente personnes de maisons différentes ont apporté leur aide chaque jour pour construire les trois maisons. Si les travailleurs venaient d'abord d'une maison du même *sizi* que celle en construction, d'autres, en plus grand nombre, venaient de maisons voisines appartenant au village. Certains pouvaient venir de maisons parentes dans d'autres villages. Selon le type de relation sociale que leurs membres avaient avec la maison en construction et les compétences de chacun, plusieurs maisons se sont relayées pour envoyer des participants. Certaines personnes s'occupaient du ramassage de la terre à flanc de montagne pendant que d'autres allaient chercher de grosses pierres pour édifier les fondations. Quelques-uns travaillaient déjà sur la charpente, pendant que d'autres aidaient au mixage, et à l'acheminement de la terre boueuse aux tasseurs de terre qui édifiaient les murs (*zhibou*) de pisé en martelant la terre (*zhibouti*) en cadence à l'aide de longs bâtons.

Quelles que fussent les journées de travail, la commensalité était toujours présente dans l'aide apportée. Les travailleurs faisaient régulièrement des pauses durant lesquelles on leur servait un encas. Sur chaque site de construction ou de travail agricole, une à deux personnes préparaient et servaient des galettes de blé avec quelques légumes, du thé et de l'alcool. Les personnes qui travaillaient sur la construction des maisons se rejoignaient chaque soir dans une différente maison du village. Étant donné que bâtir une maison est une opération très coûteuse pour ceux qui demandent de l'aide, les maisons du village se relayaient à tour de rôle pour offrir l'hospitalité aux travailleurs. Par contre, pour les travaux des champs, ce sont les maisons recevant de l'aide qui réunissaient chaque soir l'ensemble des travailleurs invités pour les remercier de leur contribution. Dans les deux cas, les moments de commensalité contribuent à solidifier les relations sociales.
Si l'entraide s'avère toujours disponible entre maisons appartenant au même *sizi*, elle est présente également avec les voisins, et entre les maisons dans lesquelles réside un partenaire sexuel. Elle s'organise sur la base de réciprocités symétriques qui participent à la réciprocité généralisée. Autrement dit, si une maison vient à rendre l'aide à une autre maison lui ayant prêté de l'aide, la relation symétrique mais restreinte qui s'est ainsi bâtie n'en devient pas pour autant permanente. L'aide peut être rendue différemment en offrant l'hospitalité aux travailleurs, en aidant au pâturage

des animaux, etc. Il faut donc privilégier une approche de la réciprocité en tant que forme de circulation comme le suggère Sahlins (2011). Si toutes les maisons participent à l'entraide et s'organisent en conséquence, il s'agit d'une stratégie toujours renouvelée de circulation de personnes entre les maisons du village.

Les décisions prises par la maison m4 sont par ailleurs représentatives de l'influence de l'idéal matrilinéaire. Dans son cas, la réalisation de l'idéal matrilinéaire est privilégiée sur le long terme par le recours à l'entraide qui est utilisée pour combler temporairement le déficit de personnes de sexe masculin, afin de rester entre « gens du même os » (*ong hing*).

Si les réseaux d'entraide (actuels et potentiels) entre maisons participent concrètement à la réalisation de l'idéal matrilinéaire au sein des espaces domestiques, les stratégies d'adoption et de captation de partenaires sexuels affichent des variations possibles à la réalisation de l'idéal matrilinéaire, lorsque ces variations deviennent nécessaires pour assurer la prospérité et la continuité des maisons. Un manque de femmes est cependant bien plus problématique que tout autre manque, car ce sont les femmes qui assurent la reproduction biologique de la maison et du lignage. Cette perspective renforce l'idée que les maisons participent à l'idéologie de reproduction sociale matrilinéaire ; elles doivent en ce sens être prises comme des unités sociales pragmatiques de la parenté, car elles visent à réaliser l'idéal matrilinéaire mais peuvent s'y dérober si nécessaire. Les problèmes inhérents à l'aide apportée par les *hrantchouba* à la maison de leur *tchumi* soulignent l'importance des stratégies mises en place dans les maisons pour le maintien de l'idéal matrilinéaire. Le cas suivant offre l'occasion de discuter les formes de réciprocité engagée et la structuration de la cohésion sociale.

**Réciprocités et centralité des maisons : une économie morale de l'entraide**

En juin 2014, Aka, le frère de Zhuoma Lamu, a été sollicité par sa *tchumi* pour l'aider à récolter (*badje*) l'orge avec deux autres jeunes filles apparentées à la maison de sa *tchumi*. L'une d'elle, Sona Latcuo, membre d'une maison apparentée, était venue aider, disait-elle pour « rendre l'aide qu'on avait reçu un peu avant », en accord avec les relations de réciprocité qui lient les maisons appartenant au même *sizi*. Dans la maison de Dashi Latcuo, la *tchumi* d'Aka, ne résidait que cinq membres. Il n'y avait pas d'hommes en âge de travailler aux champs (l'oncle, un daba, était âgé de 80 ans). Dashi Latcuo lui demandait donc souvent de l'aide pour les gros travaux. Durant cette récolte, Aka a utilisé deux chevaux de sa propre maison pour transporter l'orge. Pendant qu'ils travaillaient aux champs, Dashi Latcuo s'occupait de la maison, et sa mère faisait paître les cochons. Dans ce cas, l'aide apportée par le *hrantchouba* permettait à la maison de la *tchumi* d'effectuer les travaux autrement impossible à accomplir.

Si l'aide apportée par le *hrantchouba* contribuait à la prospérité de la maison qu'il allait aider, cela n'était pas sans poser problème pour sa propre maison. Pour Zhuoma Lamu, la *dabu* de la maison g1 à laquelle appartient Aka, l'aide qu'elle pouvait recevoir des *hrantchouba* de ses sœurs était la bienvenue, mais le fait que son frère aidait régulièrement la maison de sa *tchumi* était plus problématique. Pour elle, ce type d'aide portait préjudice à sa maison : « Il va aider sa *tchumi* alors que nous avons aussi du travail ! ». Les membres de la maison sont, en effet, censés d'abord se coordonner entre eux avant d'apporter de l'aide à une autre maison. La priorité doit être donnée à

sa propre maison pour assurer la prospérité familiale. Or, la maison d'une *tchumi* appartient par définition à un lignage différent.
L'ethnographie des relations d'entraide comme celles présentées ici montre l'étendue des relations possibles. On remarque de manière générale que le souci d'autrui est d'importance, mais qu'il s'organise concrètement au regard de relations explicitement préférentielles, c'est-à-dire en première instance entre gens de la même maison, puis du même *sizi*. Tout comme le suggère Sahlins, la solidarité est maximale pour les maisons parentes (2011 : 243-244). Il s'agit là d'une réciprocité généralisée qui n'attend pas que l'aide soit rendue directement. Le rendu de l'aide peut être différé dans le temps et s'organise en fonction des besoins d'une maison. Le déploiement de réseaux plus vastes avec des voisins ou des partenaires sexuels s'organise quant à lui comme une réciprocité équilibrée qui tend vers la réciprocité généralisée. Dans les deux cas, l'aide est attendue en retour mais elle est moins régie par l'équivalence de sa valeur que par l'équilibre de la relation. Il ne s'agit pas en effet de rendre une aide de même nature ou en même quantité (équivalence), mais de poursuivre l'intérêt d'entretenir de bonnes relations (équilibre). La valeur est ainsi pensée de manière relationnelle et non pas selon la logique évaluative des transactions marchandes impliquant un objet et son prix, un troc d'objets ou de service jugés équivalents.

L'exemple de la commensalité montre qu'un ensemble de maisons peuvent s'organiser conjointement pour supporter la construction d'une autre maison. La contrepartie de l'aide apportée pourra être différée dans le temps, parfois sur plusieurs générations. L'organisation même de l'entraide se fonde sur des valeurs de partage et d'amitié en lien direct avec la reproduction de la vie sociale elle-même. Dans la lignée des travaux sur l'économie morale (Scott 1976, Thompson 1971, 1991, Fassin 2009, 2012, et Eideliman 2012), ces formes de réciprocité montrent que les Na sont « dotés de qualités et de logiques qui les orientent dans leur évaluation de ce qui est bon et de ce qui est juste et sur lesquelles ils s'appuient pour agir dans le monde » (Fassin 2009 : 1238).

C'est parce que l'aide est conjointe à l'obligation morale de rendre et dépend des disponibilités d'une maison que l'aide apportée régulièrement par Aka à la maison de sa *tchumi* pose problème, car cette aide ne participe pas au soutien du système matrilinéaire et ne peut être que ponctuelle. L'aide d'un *hrantchouba* correspond à une forme de conjugalité. Dans la logique exprimée par Zhuoma Lamu, il faudrait qu'Aka soit recruté dans la maison de sa *tchumi* pour que l'aide qu'il apporte à la maison de cette dernière réponde à l'organisation sociale et au modèle de parenté matrilinéaire des Na. L'aide apportée par le *hrantchouba* ne correspond en effet ni à l'entraide au sein de la maison ni aux relations préférentielles entre gens du même *sizi*. Par contre, toutes les maisons reçoivent de l'aide de la part des *hrantchouba*. Les hommes circulent donc entre maisons. Cette circulation, comme je l'ai démontré, ne doit pas interférer dans les affaires de la maison et de la reproduction matrilinéaire du groupe de parenté. Elle doit nécessairement être un dernier ressort de l'organisation de l'entraide.

Puissant facteur de cohésion sociale, l'entraide réalise la dichotomie inhérente entre l'intérieur (*awo*) et l'extérieur (*apo*). Weng (1993, 2007) a particulièrement bien mis en évidence que l'organisation sociale des Na prolonge l'espace domestique dans l'espace public. Les relations internes de la maison se font à partir d'une relation sœur-frère (*mwame nimi*) et d'une relation mère-enfant (matrilinéarité). L'entraide est à l'image de ce microcosme social. Sur le plan vertical, les relations sont construites à l'image du principe matrilinéaire et donc d'abord entre maisons parentes. Les relations entre les personnes d'une même maison et entre les maisons sont quant à

elles construites à l'image des relations horizontales de *mwame nimi* nécessaire à l'entraide dans la maison. Il s'agit d'une forme de socialisation dans laquelle la reproduction sociale et matérielle place la maison au centre de l'organisation.

Plusieurs ethnologues travaillant avec des groupes minoritaires proches des Na ont également prêté attention au concept de maison dans leurs ethnographies. Koen Wellens qui a travaillé avec les Pumi, un groupe ethnique patrilinéaire et voisin des Na, et Stéphane Gros, qui a travaillé avec les Zhaba, un groupe matrilinéaire et matrifocale situé plus au nord au Sichuan, considèrent la maison comme l'unité centrale de l'organisation sociale. Les similarités entre le cas Zhaba et le cas Na ont porté Stéphane Gros à considérer qu' « [en] tant que type idéal, la "maison" est donc un ménage consanguin : un groupe de parenté co-résidentiel qui ne comprend aucun homme régulièrement présent dans le rôle de mari-père. (Ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'ils n'existent pas). » (2019). Wellens et Gros tous deux considèrent la maison comme une catégorie indépendante de la matrilignée ou de la patrilignée (voir Wellens 2010 et Gros 2019). Pourtant l'ethnographie de l'entraide en tant qu'institution régulant les relations sociales montre, dans le cas na, que les maisons sont enchâssées dans l'idéal et les pratiques matrilinéaires. La maison peut faire fléchir l'idéal matrilinéaire si cela est nécessaire à sa reproduction sociale et biologique, mais c'est bien la matrilinéarité qui commande les réseaux d'entraide dont la vie de la maison dépend en définitive.

**Conclusion**

L'observation du système d'entraide dans le village de Lijiazui contribue à la compréhension du système de parenté na en montrant que l'organisation des pratiques de subsistance et les rapports entre maisons se construisent et se réactivent sans cesse en accord avec le principe matrilinéaire. La systématicité de l'entraide à l'échelle de l'ensemble du village exprime un réseau de réciprocité à l'intérieur et entre les maisons qui leur permet autant de maintenir leur composition idéale, que de mettre en place les stratégies nécessaires à leur prospérité et à leur continuité. Les formes de production et de reproduction sociales et matérielles, liées à la maison, s'étendent à une structure de réciprocité généralisée entre maisons pour mieux soutenir la vie de tous les jours. L'entraide, c'est à dire le transfert temporaire de personnel d'une maison à l'autre en tant que forme de coopération, peut donc clairement être considérée comme une institution basée sur la réciprocité. Dans un contexte de vie difficile, la nécessité de trouver le personnel nécessaire pour produire de quoi satisfaire les besoins domestiques et les besoins cérémoniels exige un système de coopération qui opère à la fois dans la maison et au-delà de la maison. Ainsi, la coopération s'organise en premier lieu en rapport avec l'idéal matrilinéaire dans les maisons, puis avec une préférence pour l'entraide avec des maisons parentes issues du même matrilignage et, finalement, entre les matrilignages qui constituent le village dans sa totalité.

Cette politique de coopération quotidienne met en perspective toute une société régie par une économie morale qui prend forme au cœur de l'économie domestique (faire l'entraide dans la famille). L'unité politique de Lijiazui est ainsi-renforcée par l'entraide au sens où il s'agit d'une politique de tous les jours (Kerkvielt 2009). En élargissant l'analyse des faits de parenté de la société na aux relations sociales supportant les moyens de subsistances et basé sur l'entraide, et sur l'économie morale qui sous-tend l'entraide, la maison apparaît comme une catégorie effective de la parenté, enchâssée dans une matriculture et dans une idéologie matrilinéaire.

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# Using evolutionary theory to hypothesize a transition from patriliny to matriliny and back again among the ethnic Mosuo of Southwest China

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**Abstract**

*Transitions to matriliny are said to be relatively rare. This evidence is sometimes used to support arguments that perceive matriliny as a problematic and unstable system of kinship. In this article, we use an evolutionary perspective to trace changes in kinship to and from matriliny among the Mosuo of Southwest China as potentially adaptive. The Mosuo are famous for practicing a relatively rare form of female-biased kinship involving matrilineal descent and inheritance, natalocal residence, and a non-marital reproductive system ('walking marriage' or sese). Less well documented is their patrilineal subpopulation, who practice male-biased, patrilineal inheritance and descent, patrilocal residence, and exclusive marriage. Our analysis supports the existence of a prior transition to matriliny at least a millennium ago among Mosuo residing in the Yongning Basin, followed by a subsequent transition to patriliny among Mosuo residing in the more rugged mountainous terrain near Labai. We argue that these transitions make sense in light of economic, social, and political conditions that disfavor versus favor disproportionate investments in men, in matriliny versus patriliny, respectively. We conclude that additional evidence of such transitions would shed light on explanations of variation in kinship and that convergent approaches involving analysis of genetic, archaeological, and ethnohistorical data would provide holistic understandings of kinship and social change.*

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*On considère que les transitions vers la matrilinéarité sont rares, un phénomène qui est parfois utilisé pour soutenir des arguments qui perçoivent la matrilinéarité comme un système de parenté problématique et instable. Dans cet article, les auteurs utilisent une perspective évolutionniste pour retracer les changements dans les systèmes de parenté vers la matrilinéarité ou la patrilinéarité parmi les Mosuo du sud-ouest de la Chine, et analysent ces transitions comme étant potentiellement adaptatives. Les Mosuo sont réputés pour un système de parenté relativement rare impliquant la filiation et l'héritage matrilinéaires, la résidence natolocale et un système reproducteur non matrimonial («mariage ambulant» ou sese). Moins bien documentée est leur sous-population patrilinéaire, qui pratique l'héritage et la filiation patrilinéaires, la résidence patrilocale et le mariage exclusif. Notre analyse soutient l'existence d'une transition préalable vers la matrilinéarité, il y a au moins un millénaire chez les Mosuo résidant dans le bassin de Yongning, suivie d'une transition ultérieure vers la patrilinéarité chez les Mosuo résidant dans le terrain montagneux plus accidenté près de Labai. Nous soutenons que ces transitions ont un sens en vue de certaines conditions économiques, sociales et politiques qui défavorisent ou, alternativement, investissent dans les hommes de manière disproportionnée, ce qui infléchit la société vers la patrilinéarité plutôt que la matrilinéarité. Nous concluons que des preuves supplémentaires de telles transitions éclaireraient les explications de la variation des systèmes de parenté et que des approches convergentes impliquant l'analyse de données génétiques, archéologiques et ethnohistoriques fourniraient une base holistique à notre compréhension de la parenté et du changement social.*

## Introduction

Matriliny – a system of kinship in which descent is conferred along female lines[1] (Mattison 2016; but see Fortunato 2019) - is considered rare (Mattison, Shenk, et al. 2019; Murdock and White 1969; Schneider and Gough 1961). Although outdated, the most widely promulgated statistic suggests only 17% of societies are matrilineal, with a greater preponderance of patriliny (Murdock and White

1 The definition of matriliny varies and includes notions of genealogical descent, corporate descent, inheritance, and post-marital residence (locality). The overlap between these domains of kinship is considerable across societies, but far from perfect (e.g., Fortunato 2019; Kopytoff 1977; Surowiec et al. 2019). We distinguish between various facets of matri-kinship as much as possible in this article. Where they are grouped together, we make broader generalizations about features of 'female-biased kinship' (see Mattison, Quinlan et al., 2019; Mattison, Shenk, et al., 2019). This is far from perfect, as 'no society is entirely matrilineal or patrilineal as regards descent, inheritance, succession, and authority' (Richards, p. 207, cited in Fortunato 2019) and all individuals maintain relationships with and are supported by bilateral kin. And, indeed, there is significant variation even in descent among the Mosuo (because lineage membership is defined according to the household in which an individual is born and residence often contradicts expected patterns (Tables 1-3). Yet, regardless of actual residence, descent, and inheritance patterns, the Mosuo refer to themselves as 'matrilineal' versus 'patrilineal' based on community of residence. We retain this usage here, as it also facilitates our efforts to trace how and why these communities diverged, and recognizes across domains of kinship, these labels correctly reflect lineal biases.

1969)[2], though more refined analyses show that 14% may be a better figure (Fortunato 2019; Murdock and Wilson 1972). Several social and ecological features have been associated with matrilineal biases in kinship,[3] including horticulture, expansive land bases, labor-limited subsistence, and frequent occurrences of fishing excursions or external warfare that remove men from households for protracted periods (Aberle 1961; Divale 1974). Sociologically, matriliny has been associated with high rates of marital dissolution and correspondingly limited parenting by fathers (Mattison et al. 2014). These associations have been used as evidence in support of causal models explaining the conditions that are conducive to matrilineal biases in kinship as well as conditions that prompt such biases to fade or give way to other types of kinship organization (Fortunato 2012; Mattison 2011; Shenk et al. 2019). Investigations of transitions are informative for understanding the conditions that support or undermine matrilineal kinship organization, because, as changes occur within the same society, the variables that change can be isolated as causal (Shenk et al. 2019).

In this paper, we draw on ethnography and evolutionary theory to trace and explain changes in kinship norms and practices among two Mosuo 摩梭 (Na 纳) communities in Yunnan Province in southwestern China. Our arguments support the hypothesis that Mosuo people residing in the Labai mountainous region (拉伯山区) have experienced transitions from patrilineal biases in kinship organization to matrilineal and back again. While Marxism-inspired *evolutionist* models were often invoked in twentieth-century China to justify Han-Chinese supremacy over non-Han populations, this paper shows that contemporary evolutionary theory, when applied in an informed and inductive manner, can complement ethnohistorial, ethnographic, and genetic research in shedding light on how and why some cultural norms and practices persist while some change. Evolutionary theory allows us to illustrate where these transitions coincide with and depart from common evolutionary explanations of matriliny, and where new explanations may be necessary. It also provides a valuable lens to explain why cultural characteristics associated with a matrilineal past persist within the broader context of patrilineality in Labai.

## Matriliny in Evolutionist Literature and Contemporary Evolutionary Theory

Anthropology has a lengthy history of problematizing matriliny: early in the history of anthropology, kinship systems were characterized as stages along a unilinear continuum of civilization, with matrilineal kinship considered a primitive stage en route to more civilized patrilineal, patriarchal societies (Bachofen 1967; Morgan 1964 [1877]; Tylor 1889; see also Mattison 2010a; Shenk et al. 2019; Chao 1987). According to this perspective, dubbed *evolutionism*, all societies could be rank-ordered by social and technological complexity, which marked their evolutionary stage of development. Specifically, Morgan proposed five stages of successive development. The first

2 Some (e.g., Morgan, Bachofen) have argued that matriliny was more common (Shenk et al. 2019) or even universal in the past (see Knight 2008).

3 ‘Matrilineal’ refers strictly to descent and inheritance, but overlaps strongly with other female-biased forms of kinship, including matrilocality (Surowiec et al., 2019). These correlations may refer to different components of matrilineal systems (e.g., warfare to locality and horticulture to inheritance). See Fortunato 2019 for considerations of how non-overlapping domains of kinship affect inferences regarding biases in kin investments.

'primitive' state was characterized by promiscuous and unregulated sex (including among brothers and sisters) within the human 'horde'; this was followed by a shift toward consanguineous groups that produced families; then, descent groups formed around matrilineal principles; and, eventually, there was a shift toward patriliny, patrilocality, and the monogamian family (Morgan 1964 [1877]). The evolutionist view, which became influential in contemporary China after becoming a core doctrine of the Chinese Communist Party, envisions matriliny as sociologically and evolutionarily primitive[4] and culturally inferior to patriliny, explaining features of otherwise civilized societies associated with matriliny as survivals of a previous transition through a matrilineal state (Chao 1987).

The evolutionist position lacks scientific validity and has been widely criticized for numerous reasons (Knight 2008), including obvious ethnocentric biases in describing societal advancement and a fallacious understanding and application of modern evolutionary theory to describing societal evolution (c.f., Currie and Mace 2011). Indeed, Boas, while initially convinced of the evolutionary primacy of matriliny, eventually sought examples of transitions to matriliny as counterexamples that would 'discredit Morgan' (Boas 1890; cited in Shenk et al. 2019). Not much later, European structural-functionalists discarded the notion of universal stages of kinship, positing instead variation in kinship around universal elementary forms (Lévi-Strauss 1969) and/or principles (Radcliffe-Brown 1924). Additional criticisms targeted overly simplistic typologies of evolutionism (e.g., Lowie 1919, 1920) and the inconsistencies between the evolutionist framework and ethnographic observations (Kopytoff 1977; Leach 1961; Malinowski 1927).

Contemporary (neo-Darwinian) evolutionary theory departs significantly from unilineal evolutionary theory in its attempts to understand variation in human kinship (Mattison 2011; Shenk and Mattison 2011). Notably, contemporary evolutionary theory typically does not begin with the premise that matrilineal kinship organization is problematic (Mattison, Shenk, et al. 2019), instead focusing on how historical and contemporary variation in numerous female-biased kinship institutions sheds light on factors that establish women as central to the functions of human families and/or limit certain roles of men (Mattison, Shenk, et al. 2019). Although its theoretical framework differs, evolutionary anthropology has taken up the mantle of prior cross-cultural and structural-functional investigations of matriliny to depict the patterns, causes, and consequences of matrilineal kinship with specific attention to *variation* in the ways that matriliny and related institutions are expressed.

Secondly, in contrast to evolution*ism*, which sought to find *universal* patterns in kinship, contemporary evolutionary theory anticipates a wide range of *variation* in kinship norms, institutions, and behaviors as these take shape in remarkably diverse social and ecological environments (Mattison and Sear 2016; Shenk and Mattison 2011). Thirdly, this wide range of variation precludes unilineal evolutionary processes as drivers of change – a beetle is as evolved as a human since both continue to reproduce

4 An evolutionarily ancestral or primitive (cf., derived) trait is one that is inherited via a common ancestor and has undergone relatively limited change. There is no value judgment attached to this term and no expectation of sequential evolution to more advanced traits. Sociologically primitive traits are traits that reflect a poor fit to the contemporary environment; the fact that such traits persist suggests to adherents of this view that more advanced traits should have evolved or will evolve to take its place. We are not adherents of this view.

successfully in their respective environments. Likewise, patriliny is no more evolved than matriliny. Rather, within the constraints of their personal circumstances and the societies within which they are embedded, individuals adjust behaviors in relation to local socio-ecologies so as to effectively acquire resources and secure the health and well-being of themselves and their children.

Contemporary evolutionary explanations[5] of matriliny center on two widely known correlates of matrilineal kinship: low paternity certainty and means of subsistence that limit advantages of male authority. Low paternity certainty has been described as one of the 'oldest hypotheses in social science' (Alexander 1974) and is not uniquely evolutionary (see, e.g., Chao 1987). In its simplest form, this hypothesis suggests that anything that lowers a man's certainty over his parentage – e.g., high likelihood of cuckoldry, prolonged absences, etc. – will disincentivize investments in his wife's or partner's children, as any such investments would result in returns to the biological father rather than to the man making such costly investments. At some point (the paternity threshold), a man's paternity becomes so insecure that it makes more sense for him to limit investments in parenting (Mattison, Quinlan, et al. 2019) or invest in his sister's children, and matriliny results (e.g., Alexander 1974; Greene 1978). Variations on the simplest version of this hypothesis note that its assumptions are restrictive and that relaxing those creates a broader range of circumstances under which matrilineal kinship organization may be evolutionary stable. For example, if returns to investment are non-linear, if polyandrous marriage frees men from needing to invest in their own children, and if the effects of non-overlapping parentage are considered, matrilineal biases in investment can evolve even under much higher levels of paternity certainty and with different consequences for genetic relatedness between fathers and the targets of their investments (see Fortunato 2012; Rogers 2012)[6].

The second class of explanations focuses on the different ways in which men versus women may benefit from different means of subsistence. In general, men are thought to capitalize on resources differently than do women – men are able to use resources to increase their number of children to a degree that is not feasible for women (e.g., by securing additional wives, leading to large numbers of children). Women also benefit from access to and control over resources in similar ways (Reynolds et al. 2020; Scelza 2013), but often to a lesser extent than men, especially with respect to fertility (Trivers and Willard 1973; but see Borgerhoff Mulder 2004; Brown et al. 2009). Thus, subsistence systems such as horticulture that do not provide disproportionate advantages to men are thought conducive to matriliny, especially if these are also associated with low paternity certainty (Cronk 1989; Flinn 1989; Fortunato 2012; Holden et al. 2003; Mattison, Shenk, et al. 2019).[7]

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5 Evolutionary theory is built based on assumptions that individuals attempt to maximize reproductive success/optimize fertility based on individual constraints and the environments in which they are situated. Tests of evolutionary theory that involve direct metrics of RS are helpful, but not required, to evaluate evolutionary hypotheses.

6 Marital systems that produce low confidence in paternity are associated with matriliny and consistent with evolutionary arguments. Polyandry, including walking marriage as practiced among some Mosuo (see below) would likely lower paternity certainty and might also decrease the relative benefit to men of investing in their biological children, if those children are already receiving investments from the mother's other lovers.

7 This is a very brief sketch of these explanations. Fuller descriptions and consideration of less common explanations are provided in Mattison et al., 2019.

Note that these explanations are not meant solely to explain variation in kinship at the group level, but also extend to individual decision-making. Thus, populations that rely on horticulture as a primary means of subsistence are, on average, more likely to be matrilineal; individuals whose own circumstances limit the perceived value of patriliny or investment in sons are expected to bias investments toward matrilineal kin (Cronk 1989; Mattison 2011; Quinlan and Flinn 2005). These hypotheses are inconsistent with universalist perspectives such as unilinear evolutionism and certain strands of sociobiology (see Mace 2014). The explanations are, however, consistent with non-evolutionary perspectives that characterize matriliny as a system of limited male control over resources (e.g., Alesina et al. 2013; BenYishay et al. 2017) and cross-cultural and structural-functionalist arguments that focus on how social support is affected by differences in kinship and access to resources (e.g., Divale 1974; Douglas and Kaberry 2013; Ember and Ember 1971; Murdock 1949). At the same time, there have been very few empirical tests of these explanations and even fewer documented cases of transitions to and from matriliny that would help to elucidate its causes and consequences (Shenk et al. 2019). This is especially glaring in light of the biases affecting the ethnographic record and likely over-generalizations based on biased examples (Kopytoff 1977; Murdock 1949; Shenk et al. 2019)[8].

In this article, we take up these issues via an analysis of divergent kinship norms, institutions, and practices among the Mosuo of southwest China, a society with two distinct sub-populations that are separated geographically, but share ethnic identity, language, religious traditions, and other cultural ideals while exhibiting strong divergences in kinship norms and institutions.[9] We explore the history and contemporary expressions of these divergences using qualitative and quantitative data collected in 2017 and 2018 from nine months of participant-observation, informal interviews and conversations with over two dozen individuals, and a demographic survey conducted with 505 households in Mosuo villages in Yunnan. Our discussion begins by describing the ethnography of these two kinship systems, which helps to identify the extent to which transitions are associated with divergence in practices. Next, we draw on ethnohistorical literature and genetic studies to suggest possible directions of change in kinship modalities and explanations, both evolutionary and ethnographic, for these transitions. As we describe in the conclusion, this case study provides scant evidence of relatively

8 This also extends to specific domains of kinship or, more accurately, specific biases in investments. For example, transmission of information, inheritance, and access to household resources may be differentially biased toward certain kin with the same changes in these causal factors. This is beyond the scope of this paper, but interested readers should refer to Fortunato (2019).

9 We have been working with the Mosuo since 2001 (TB), 2006 (SMM) and 2017 (CYS), collecting both quantitative and qualitative data through mixed methods including participant observation, interviewing, and formal questionnaires. The data described here were collected in 2017 and 2018 from matrilineal and patrilineal villages in Yunnan Province. In each village, we collected socio-demographic data, along with health measures based on anthropometric measurements or biomarkers recovered from dried blood spots. We spoke to one or more individuals in each household selected by convenience sampling, walking door to door in an attempt to cover as many households as possible in a given village. Our final sample, in the matrilineal and patrilineal communities, respectively, included: 300 and 205 households and 1902 and 1062 individuals (socio-demographic data); 582 and 390 individuals (anthropometry); 207 and 178 individuals (biomarkers). We collected additional information about migration history during the summer of 2019.

recent transitions *to* matriliny. The more recent reversion in one subpopulation of the Mosuo to patriliny underscores flexibility in kinship institutions and the vast adaptability of human cultures.

**One Ethnic Group, Two Kinship Systems**

Although every culture exhibits flexibility in kinship (Harrell 1997; Stone 2014), among contemporary societies, the Mosuo are distinct as a single culture with two geographically separate subpopulations with different kinship systems – one predominately patrilineal and one predominately matrilineal. We begin by examining the broad differences in kinship institutions between the well-known matrilineal subpopulation and the lesser-known patrilineal subpopulation. These differences in kinship norms and institutions allow us to investigate what we believe are two transitions to matriliny and to patriliny arising in the same culture over around a millennium.

The Mosuo 摩梭 (aka Na 纳, Naze 纳日, Yongning Naxi 永宁纳西) (Harrell 2001; McKhann 1995) are a population of roughly 40,000 individuals living at upwards of 1700 meters' elevation on the border of Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces (Walsh 2004). The matrilineal Mosuo, occasionally characterized as 'China's last matriarchal society' (see Mattison 2010b)[10], are well known to ethnographers for practicing a relatively rare form of female-biased kinship involving matrilineal descent and inheritance, natalocal residence, and a non-marital reproductive system known as *sese* ('walking marriage' or *zouhun* 走婚). In this system, a man visits his partner in the evening, sometimes secretly, returning to his maternal house in the morning, and leaves most care and authority over any resultant children to their mother's brother (Walsh 2004). Less well known is a smaller subpopulation of Mosuo residing amidst steeper mountainous terrain in Labai 拉伯, about a day's journey from the main basin area (Yongning 永宁) that acts as the nexus of matrilineal Mosuo activity.[11] The Labai subpopulation is predominantly patrilineal and patrilocal; they currently practice exclusive marriage as the normative form of reproductive union (Shih 2010, p. 126).

In this article, we focus on patrilineal Mosuo residing in Labai, a region covering 475 $km^2$ of a long strip of steep mountainous terrain, stretching from the margin of Yongning basin in the east to the Jinsha River 金沙 (also known as the Moxie River 磨些 in imperial China) to the west.[12] According to a report provided by a local governmental representative in 2018, seventy-nine percent of the region is covered with dense woods and vegetation. The average altitude of the region is 2290 meters, with a

10 The Mosuo are not strictly 'matriarchal' in that the maternal uncle is symbolically as important as the maternal grandmother (but see Mattison, Quinlan, et al. 2019). They are also not the only Chinese society to practice matriliny now or in the past. Some contemporary Pumi (Prmi) communities living nearby engage in similar matrilineal practices (see Harrell 2001), and the Tibetan Zhaba also practice matriliny and visiting marriage (Chen 2018); many other Tibeto-Burman speaking populations engage in relatively unrestricted romantic practices without being matrilineal; and, as described below, the extent to which contemporary populations retain matrilineal traits is debated.
11 This region is sometimes referred to as Labo, including by Shih (2010), but *Labai* is closer to the Naru language pronunciation. Mathieu (2003) refers to the region as Labei. The three terms are synonymous.
12 There are also patrilineal Mosuo residing in Sichuan (see Harrell 2001). We have not engaged in research in those communities so limit our discussion to the patrilineal communities in Yunnan Province included in our surveys.

maximum elevation 4300 meters. Because of the mountainous landscape, population is sparse in the region as compared to the Yongning Basin (Blumenfield et al. 2018). Arable land per capita is 2.67 mu (0.44 acres). The area has historically been relatively inaccessible (Harrell 2001; Mattison 2010b). Though access improved recently following road construction in the 2010s, the area remains relatively remote, with roads often impassible due to landslides (Blumenfield et al. 2018). There is no market in Labai, and residents often rely on travelers to Yongning to acquire foodstuff and household items. According to the government report, the population of Labai was 10,574 in 2015, among whom 4199 identified as Mosuo. The region has long been ethnically heterogenous and today is also home to Han, Pumi, Naxi, Lisu, Miao, Zhuang, and Zang (Tibetan) populations, all of whom identify as patrilineal.

Mosuo people in Labai and Yongning today share ethnic identity and language (albeit spoken with different regional accents and with minor variations in vocabulary). Religious practices overlap in both regions: cultural myths and ritualistic knowledge are imparted by religious specialists known as *daba* 达巴. Tibetan Buddhism is also common, especially in matrilineal areas. Rites of passage and many other cultural practices also largely overlap in the two subpopulations; they share a common food culture and style of dress that distinguishes them from neighboring ethnic groups.

Despite these similarities, Labai and Yongning Mosuo express notable differences in cultural norms and practices surrounding kinship. Whereas the Yongning Mosuo are predominantly matrilineal, Labai Mosuo are predominantly patrilineal. This is true both in stated norms and largely in practice: 51% of the households we surveyed in Yongning (versus 10.7% in Labai) were structured matrilineally, while 51.2% in Labai (versus 15.7% in Yongning) assumed a patrilineal structure (Table 1). Whereas among the Yongning Mosuo, all resident lineal descendants communally inherit household property, among the Labai Mosuo, sons are the primary inheritors of family property, and daughters move out of their natal home (Table 2) (and often village; Table 3) to reside with their husbands after marriage.

Inheritance in matrilineal Mosuo communities occurs via the maternal line: all co-resident members of a household—normally including only women's children—are equal inheritors of household (*yidu*) property. However, because men's children typically reside with their mothers, this leads to *de facto* inheritance from a set of sisters to their daughters (see Mattison 2011). Studies diverge on particulars of inheritance mode in Labai, but there is a greater degree of inequality built in as only sons, and often only one son, inherit the house and its land. Some report primogeniture, where eldest sons inherit (Mathieu 2003, p. 247; Mattison 2010b), whereas others suggest relatively equal division of family property among male descendants, and occasional inclusion of female descendants (Zhou 1988, pp. 437–8). Others suggest that ultimogeniture (youngest son inheriting) prevails: "The youngest sons usually enjoy priorities in situations of inheritance; they are given the family house and land and equipment that are of better quality and sometimes quantity" (Zhan 1998, p. 356).

Our recent ethnographic observation corroborates a stated preference for ultimogeniture. Several of our informants touted the benefits of ultimogeniture for securing livelihoods of youngest-borns; the youngest son often inherits the family house, where he continues to live with his parents, while his elder brothers move out to establish their new households elsewhere. This arrangement, these

informants explained, ensures that both the youngest brother and the aging parents are well-taken care of. Cultivating the family's existing farmland is believed to be easier than moving somewhere else to start over. Normative rules aside, informants acknowledge that inheritance decisions are made based on a range of factors beyond gender and birth order, such as the household's wealth, as well as the individual's ability and marital status. Whatever the historical norm, it appears at this point that inheritance is variable (Tables 4 and 5).

Romantic pairing among the matrilineal Mosuo in Yongning has historically centered around *sese*, described above, although a small proportion of matrilineal Mosuo have also engaged in marriage, historically and continuing until today (see C.-K. Shih 2001). Patrilocal marriage in Labai usually involves the transfer of brideprice and banquets hosted by the groom's family (Zhou 1988, p. 427), demonstrating the importance of the bride and her family (Lamu 2008; Mathieu 2003). According to Mathieu, marriage rituals in Labai also recognize that a house's gods are connected to the women in the household (2003, p. 241). Whereas Yongning Mosuo households are large, intergenerational households, with up to 16 members (Mattison 2010a), most Labai residents live in smaller households, in which married couples co-reside with their children and sometimes the husband's parents and their unmarried children. Scholarly accounts report a cultural preference for cross-cousin marriage, even though young people have considerable freedom to choose their spouses (Mathieu 2003, p. 237; Shih 2010, p. 201).[13] We saw a few cases of cross-cousin marriage in Labai during our field research in 2018. Our informants described these marriages as arrangements that reinforce existing kin relationships (*qin shang jia qin* 亲上加亲). Very few of our Labai respondents identified their relationships as walking marriage (Table 6), although we heard about furtive relationships and children born out of wedlock in a few instances; premarital dating is normal in both regions but is no longer referred to as *sese* in Labai (Mathieu 2003; Shih 2010, pp. 122-126).[14] Mosuo men and women can choose their partners freely, but men are expected to marry a lover who becomes pregnant (Mathieu 2003, p. 251).

Differences in gender norms are consistent with female versus male biases in kinship systems. Women are central to the organization of the matrilineal household whereas men have assumed positions of importance in patrilineal households, if less hierarchically than in other Chinese patrilineal populations. For example, the place of honor (on the left-hand side closest to the hearth, which sits in

13 Shih cites research published in 1988 by Zhan Chengxu, estimating that about half of marriages in the Jiaze region of Labai in 1963 were reciprocal cross-cousin marriages (Zhan 1988: 357, cited in Shih 2010: 117). Shih writes, "The norm was that the sister's eldest daughter was obliged to marry the brother's eldest son, if she was wanted." (2010: 117)

14 Historically, *sese* was apparently a common practice in Labai. Shih provides an eight-generation genealogy that includes both marriage and *sese* relationships (2010, pp. 123-126). The eldest ancestor in Generation I had only *sese* relationships, her sons in Generation II both married, and the daughter of one son, Generation III, had *sese* relationships. Her son married, and his children (Generation V) both had *sese* relationships. The descendants of one of these children, in Generation VI, had *sese* relationships followed by marriage. One of these descendants was a son born in 1916 who married at age 30, then had nine children. Everyone in Generations VII and VIII captured in the genealogy married, with the exception of the youngest individuals. Flexibility in the system, characterized by alternating *sese* and marriage from one generation to the next, is reported to have ended around the same time that the political system changed to Communist Party control.

the middle of the *remi* (*zumu wu* 祖母屋, grandmother room) in the matrilineal Mosuo house—the cornerstone of the household where family members eat, relax, cook, and sometimes sleep—is given to the oldest woman in the house (Weng 1993). In Labai, the hearth is usually positioned in the corner, and the place of honor can be assumed by either parent. Household heads can be male or female in both matrilineal and patrilineal communities, but a far greater fraction of household heads is female in the former: 62.2% of the households we surveyed in Yongning reported having female heads of household, while only 24.4% of the surveyed households in Labai did (Table 4).

Taken together, kinship institutions and norms display differences—some significant and some subtle—in matrilineal Yongning and patrilineal Labai. There are clear divergences in the standard domains of kinship that have undoubtedly resulted in different access to and control over resources and social support for women versus men in each context. At the same time, the majority of comparative work on the correlates and effects of patriliny versus matriliny compare the matrilineal Mosuo to the neighboring Yi (Gong et al. 2014; Gong and Yang 2012) or Han (Liu and Zuo 2019; Zhang et al. 2018), whose traditions of patriliny are both longer established and far more male-biased than those of the patrilineal Mosuo (Lamu 2008; Mathieu 2003). These more subtle differences between the patrilineal and matrilineal Mosuo may be the result of a relatively recent transition to patriliny in Labai compared to much lengthier histories of patriliny (and indeed, patriarchy) among neighboring ethnic groups.

**Historical Origins of Mosuo Matriliny: Ethnohistorical evidence and evolutionary interpretations**

How did these differences in kinship norms and institutions arise within a single ethnic group? Did the Mosuo begin as matrilineal, patrilineal, or something else? What were the circumstances under which these transitions took place? What can reconstructing these transitions among the Mosuo reveal about kinship transitions more generally? Because matrilineal Mosuo kinship is thought by many to be unusual, the origins of its institutions have been extensively documented and investigated. Based on associated evidence and existing analyses (discussed below), we infer a lengthy duration of habitation in the Yongning Basin and in the adjacent Muli 木里 region of Sichuan that involved a transition *to* matriliny that predated or coincided with this move to the Basin area. Although evidence is more limited regarding the differentiation of the patrilineal Mosuo, signs point to a more recent move to the Labai region and a coincident adoption of patriliny. The factors that have been associated with these transitions are consistent with aspects of evolutionary theory, but also suggest novel hypotheses that warrant future attention.

*Adoption of matriliny in Yongning following ethnic divergence*
The origins of the matriliny in populations now known as (matrilineal) Mosuo have been studied from various vantage points. Some accounts suggest that Qiangic 羌 nomadic herders from the northwest migrated south to escape the rule of China's Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) and became ancestral to today's Mosuo, Pumi, and Naxi peoples in Lijiang, Yongning, and vicinity (e.g., Lamu 2008; Lu et al. 2012; Ma 2014; McKhann 1998). These people were long ago described as 'know[ing] their mothers but not their fathers' (see, e.g., Zhong and Xiao 2008, cited in Lu et al., 2012). While historical records

of antiquity are incomplete, it is possible that some ethnic enclaves were matrilineal during centuries of intertribal warfare until the region came under the control of the Tang (618–907) and Nanzhao (738–937) Dynasties.

Genetic evidence points toward an origin of matriliny, however, not linked to a common matrilineal ancestor but as a distinct practice adopted in the Yongning basin *after* inhabitants there became separated from a common ancestral population shared with neighboring ethnic groups. In a recent analysis, Lu et al. (2012) test the hypothesis that, should matrilineal Mosuo today have practiced matriliny for thousands of years, there should be less diversity in their population's mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) when compared with surrounding patrilineal populations. mtDNA is inherited solely via one's mother, so if women remain in their natal communities, as they often do among the matrilineal Mosuo today, diversity in mtDNA should be lower than if women from many lineages migrate into communities as is common in neighboring patrilineal and patrilocal populations. Their analysis reveals genetic clustering among Mosuo, Pumi, and Naxi, implying similarities in their genomes and recent ancestry, with a significantly closer relationship between the Mosuo and the Pumi. This implies a common ancestral population in the same region, as expected. Because Lu et al. (2012) find that the Mosuo cluster primarily with other groups who are patrilineal and patrilocal, it is more parsimonious[15] to infer that the Mosuo became matrilineal following ethnic divergence from a shared patrilineal and patrilocal ancestor than that all other closely related groups became patrilineal and patrilocal from a shared matrilineal ancestor.

Whereas the genetic evidence does not provide firm timing for a transition to matriliny, ethnohistorical accounts infer a lengthy history of matriliny, originating in the region around Yongning during the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. This inference is based in part on when specific historical references are made to the Mosuo. Although the 'Mo-so' have been recorded as living elsewhere in Yunnan and southwest Sichuan, the term reappears in the regional historical record during the Tang Dynasty (Mathieu 2003, p. 370).[16] There is also evidence showing that the ruling elites in Yongning, the Mou, 'succeeded each other through their matriline' by this time (Mathieu 2003, p. 88). The Tang–Song era also spans the period when the historical *Nü Guo* 女国 (women's kingdom), north of present-day Muli, was reported to have arrived in the Lijiang and Yongning areas. Records date this to some time during the tenth century, supporting the existence of matrilineal practices in some ethnic enclaves in the region (Mathieu 2003, pp. 407-409).

The reasons for the Mosuo adoption of matriliny are unclear; however, at least one common explanation is broadly consistent with evolutionary hypotheses. This is the hypothesis that the 'frequent mercantile travels of [Mosuo] men resulted in … matrilocality' (Liu 2008, cited in Lu et al. 2012). Even prior to the Tang period, peoples of northwest Yunnan were engaged in long-distance trade, silver mining from mountains, and gold extraction from rivers—activities that fed the local feudal economy (Mathieu 2003, p. 35; Shih 2010). These economic activities drew men away from

15 In biology, 'parsimonious' refers to the simplest explanation of the results.
16 An earlier, similar term, "Mo-sha", disappeared after an unsuccessful revolt by that group in 225 A.D., and it is not clear that Mo-sha people are the same as the later "Mo-so" (Mathieu 2003, p. 370).

their homes, making it necessary for women to manage domestic finances and activities (Wang and Luo 1991). Sociologically, female centrality would have been a very likely consequence of protracted male absences (see also Chao 1987). Male absences would also have lowered men's paternity certainty and their interests in taking on the role of fathers (Mattison 2011; Mattison, Quinlan, et al. 2019).[17]

Still, others have noted that lengthy male absences were not unique to the Mosuo, who have been dealing with the same historical, ecological, and economic contingencies as their neighbors (Lamu 1992, cited in Mathieu 2003, p. 22). We speculate that the Mosuo's relative (certainly not complete) isolation in the expansive Yongning Basin until the early twentieth century (Shih 2001) created additional conditions that favored the initial development and later persistence of matrilineal institutions. Here, evolutionary theory fills gaps in the historical record to illuminate why matriliny might have developed: expansive land and labor-limited agriculture are often conducive to matriliny (Fortunato 2012), and the terrain of the Yongning Basin seems to fit this description compared to the more rugged terrain occupied by the patrilineal Mosuo.

Other interesting explanations of Mosuo matrilineal institutions are less clearly consistent with evolutionary theory as currently conceptualized. For example, Zhao (1987) argues that Mosuo matriliny is the product of changes in family and gender roles that came about as Lamaism required that a quarter of the Mosuo population remain celibate. Wei-Yang Chao (1987) suggests that lamas had to work around restrictions that made it permissible for lamas to be genitors and sexual partners, but not paters or formal husbands. Mosuo matriliny and the visiting marriage system would be creative solutions to this problem. However, we view this as a somewhat unlikely explanation: we do not see similar institutions among other Tibetan and Mongolian groups who also practice the Yellow Sect of Lamaism (Shih 2001). It may be more likely that these religious practices have been easy to reconcile with pre-existing matrilineal practices of the Yongning Mosuo. Mathieu (2003) ties matriliny to two events: the migration of matrilineal tribes from the Nü Guo during the tenth century, and the feudal reforms that arose during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) when official recognition of Mosuo chieftains by Ming officials began. According to Mathieu's reconstruction, implementing a non-marital reproductive system in Yongning contributed to the transition of Yongning society from a tribal caste system to a three-tiered feudal domain. The non-marital system, which she suggests would have limited caste-based alliances that could be strengthened through marriages, would have solidified the power of the chieftain and been 'advantageous to Yongning feudal rule' (Mathieu 2003, p. 399). Although this may suggest a somewhat more recent transition to matriliny than the above material, political pressure is undoubtedly part of the landscape affecting adaptations in kinship, whenever the transition took place.

17 Polyandrous marriage could result in additional benefits to men of diverting their investments toward sororal nieces and nephews (Fortunato 2012). However, as argued elsewhere, we have limited direct evidence for significant male investment in sororal nieces and nephews.

**From matriliny to patriliny in the Labai mountainous region**

If the Mosuo originally adopted matrilineal institutions after cleaving from a patrilineal ancestral population, then today's Labai Mosuo either represent an older continuation of ancestral customs – evolutionarily the most parsimonious explanation based on phylogenetic analysis – or have readopted patriliny following migration away from the matrilineal populations in Yongning and Muli. This history is much more difficult to reconstruct, given more limited attention to the patrilineal Mosuo subpopulation. However, the ethnohistorical evidence strongly suggests that the patrilineal Mosuo cleaved off from the Yongning Basin and from Muli at some point in the not-too-distant past. Examining available evidence of this cleavage through an evolutionary lens, we suggest possible reasons why today's patrilineal Mosuo might have readopted patriliny and associated institutions: as adaptations to an arduous terrain with relatively circumscribed land, need for consistent male labor inputs, and cultural assimilation to a more consistent presence of other ethnic groups with patrilineal customs.

Although evidence is relatively thin, some ethnologists and fieldworkers suggest that some Mosuo migrated from Yongning to Labai relatively recently. Chuan-Kang Shih's examination of Labai reveals 'no verifiable record indicating when and why the Mos[u]o first migrated to the mountainous area' (2010, p. 115), yet implies strongly that the patrilineal Mosuo migrated from the Yongning Basin and gradually came to adopt patrilineal norms and institutions following settlement in outlying regions. Relaying a conversation with a Labai Mosuo person, Shih reports that, at an unspecified time in the past, Yongning residents moved to Labai in search of gold in the Jinsha River (Shih 2010, p. 115), a phenomenon that was further corroborated by one of our informants. Another ethnological study conducted in 1963 suggests that initial migrants from Yongning moved at an undetermined time with their livestock to the Labai mountains to graze (Zhou 1988, p. 414). Other studies suggest that that the Mosuo may have moved relatively recently from Yongning, merely 'ten-odd generations ago' (*shiduo dai yiqian* 十多代以前, about 250 years ago) (Lamu 2008, p. 115). These accounts point to Labai Mosuo hailing ultimately from a matrilineal, Yongning origin, though there is no clear evidence as to when the initial migration took place. Another clue comes from the rituals conducted by the *daba*, which send recently deceased ancestors back toward *Sipiannawa* according to prescribed routes. Both *daba* and adult family members are aware of which route should be taken; these routes are said to mirror original migration routes (Lamu Gatusa, personal communication, September 2020).

Ethnographic insights are consistent with evolutionary explanations in explaining adoption of recent patrilineal customs based on ecological and social differences between the patrilineal and matrilineal regions, but also offer new hypotheses that could be explored by evolutionary and non-evolutionary scholars (see also Fortunato 2012). Indigenous scholar and Labai native Lamu Gatusa points to economic considerations surrounding the value of land versus labor, which resonate with evolutionary and economic arguments (e.g., Ji et al. 2014; Kolodny et al. 2019; Mattison, Quinlan, et al. 2019). He explained that the smaller plots of farmland in Labai do not require as much labor to cultivate and maintain as the expansive lands in the Yongning basin. The practical agricultural motivation to keep siblings together in one big matrilineal family is therefore not valid in Labai's ecological context (Lamu

2008, p. 115). One of our informants, a man in his forties, suggested that some Mosuo moved from Yongning to Labai because of population pressure, especially during the twentieth century. He explained that even though there is surplus of land in the Yongning basin, the relatively high altitude (over 2,600 meters) in Yongning results in limited productivity of only one harvest per year. A warmer climate and plentiful rain in Labai can produce as many as three harvests a year, he said. He explained, "One *mu* of land in Labai produces as much as 5–6 *mu* in Yongning." Terrain in Labai is not suitable for rice cultivation, but the climate there is indeed more conducive to growing vegetables, fruits, and other crops (cf. Blumenfield et al. 2018, pp. 264–5). This suggests that the need for *consistent* labor within a terrain that is relatively saturated (as opposed to easily expanded) may result in patriliny if households require defense and men are needed to participate in household labor.[18]

Under many conditions, men will prefer to invest intensely in their children and their households if a high degree of paternity certainty exists (Flinn 1989; Hrdy 2000; Mattison, Quinlan, et al. 2019; but see Fortunato 2012; Rogers 2013). This makes one widely-invoked explanation surrounding the relative difficulty of engaging in walking marriage in mountainous terrain especially interesting. This explanation centers on the difficulties associated with 'walk[ing] back and forth' (*sese*) between houses at night among small villages that are sparsely located and amidst very difficult, steep terrain. After taking a strenuous hike to a Labai village that lasted from dawn to after dark, Shih writes, "I am firmly convinced that the rugged terrain is a decisive factor, if not the only one, that has limited the practice of *tisese* and led to wide practice of marriage among the Moso in the mountainous area" (Shih 2010, p. 131). Our Mosuo informants from Yongning similarly found it difficult to fathom how people could commute among different Labai villages on a regular basis. If a Labai man started hiking from his natal village in the evening, our informants speculated, 'dawn would have broken (*tian dou liang le* 天都亮了) by the time he reached his destination!' This is, of course, an exaggeration, but *sese* is indeed more impractical in Labai than in the Yongning Basin. The flatter landscape in Yongning permitted villages to grow much larger and to locate relatively close to one another, allowing men to travel between hamlets and villages without undue difficulty.

Cultural factors also matter when it comes to the readoption of patriliny. Christine Mathieu (2003) documents extensive efforts on the part of ruling elites, including Mou and Ah chiefs, to downplay their matrilineal succession and emphasize their patrilineal links. Under the influence of the Confucian scholar Yang Shen, the sixteenth century chief Mu Gong re-wrote his genealogy. The Ah chiefs were eager to downplay their Mongol connections, but their pre-Mongol successions were matrilineal, and matrilineality was not a legitimate line of succession in Chinese terms. The chiefs of the frontier were not necessarily subject to Confucian rules, but the Lijiang chiefs were eager to align themselves with imperial powers.[19] The perception of matriliny as culturally inferior might have facilitated the development of institutionalized marriage in the Labai mountains. Even today, some Labai Mosuo we talked to continue to call walking marriage a 'messy' (*luan* 乱) practice, implying an association

18 One informant explained, "There is no one at home [to help with housework and farm work]," and, "My husband's brothers have all left [for marriage or for work elsewhere]; it is pitiful for him to be alone all by himself."
19Early in the Qing Dynasty, patrilineal succession became a required element of native chieftain rule (Shih 2010, p. 106; cf. Shih 2001).

between polygynandry and illegitimate relationships, relationships that would, in any case, reinforce matrilineal investments by men in children (Fortunato 2012). Increasingly conscious of external perceptions in a predominately patrilineal country, the pursuit of status beyond the Mosuo community may also have contributed to the abandonment of matrilineal structures.

Communist marriage reforms in the 1950s through the 70s may also have contributed to adoption of marital practices thought to increase paternity certainty.[20] During this period, the Communist Party deployed 'one-husband, one-wife' campaigns in Yongning villages, encouraging and eventually requiring community members to abandon *sese* in favor of marriage (Chou 2009; Shih 2010). An informant described his paternal grandfather's migration to the Labai region from Yongning in the 1920s–1930s. The grandfather initially practiced walking marriage and had several wives across different Labai villages, before eventually settling down with our informant's grandmother. Our informant believed that walking marriage in Labai gradually ceased during his grandfather's generation in part because it was cast as an uncivilized practice by the Communist State.

Whereas the marriage campaigns ran against customs in Yongning, they likely reinforced marriage among the Mosuo of Labai. Patriliny and associated customs were likely reinforced further in Labai by significant and longstanding ethnic heterogeneity in the region located along the trade route to Tibet, Burma, and India (Lamu 2008, p. 115; see also Zhan et al. 1980, pp. 195–6). Labai Mosuo often found themselves living in small hamlets or villages near the patrilineal Naxi or other patrilineal groups. *Sese* only functions well when both members of a couple are part of larger families that expect to house them throughout their lives. If a Mosuo woman became romantically involved with a Naxi man, to satisfy his own cultural expectations, the man would expect to marry. A Mosuo man enamored of a Naxi woman would also need to establish a new household if their relationship were to last and meet with family approval, unless his family lacked female siblings. Thus, partnerships with members of other groups usually precluded *sese* relationships, while facilitating acculturating to and embracing patrilineal practices.

**Patrilineal Practice, Matrilineal Culture?**

While the historical evidence of Mosuo origins and relatedness to other ethnic groups are topics of active debate, the contention that Mosuo people became patrilineal upon their migration from the matrilineal regions of Yongning and Muli to mountainous Labai has been less scrutinized. Given the apparent recency of the transition to patriliny, what, if any, features of matriliny remain? Limited scholarship and our own observations suggest that Labai Mosuo indeed share certain features of matrilineal kinship that predominate in Yongning. Lamu Gatusa (2008, p. 114) describes Labai as a society 'in transition' (*guodu* 过渡) [from matriliny]. Specifically, he explains, "Labai is not, strictly speaking, matrilineal households and *zouhun*, nor is it a strict one-husband, one-wife system; rather, it's in a transitional state." (Lamu 2008, p. 114) He goes on to argue that the Labai Mosuo, while

20 The Marriage Campaigns have had only partial sustained influence on marriage patterns in the matrilineal Mosuo, even though marriage is also institutionalized among the matrilineal Mosuo as an alternative to *sese* (Mattison 2010a).

characterized by patrilocal marriage and patrilineal inheritance and descent, have retained certain features of matriculture. The emphasis on recent matriliny in emic perspective is important to consider as it speaks to the apparent recency of kinship transition in the Mosuo.

Contemporary evolutionary theory allows us to forego the assumption of progressive transformations and instead focus on shared ancestry in explaining the ethnographic phenomenon that we too found in our research. Our observations were similar to those of Lamu Gatusa in that we similarly saw cultural characteristics that might be more conventionally associated with matrilineal cultures: premarital sexual norms in Labai resemble walking marriage (see also Harrell 2002), women enjoy relatively high status, and the mother's brother - though not co-resident - continues to assume important symbolic and ceremonial significance in patrilineal households (Lamu 2008, pp. 114–18; c.f. Radcliffe-Brown 1924; Starkweather and Keith 2019).[21] Indeed, many of our informants confessed that they did not think much about differences between the two subpopulations. Instead, our informants were occasionally at pains to reinforce shared identity despite differences in kinship norms and institutions. In at least two instances, seemingly frustrated by the interviewer's persistence in asking about the historical trajectories of migration, our informants—one from Yongning and one from Labai—ended the conversation by reaffirming their shared Mosuoness: "We all are Mosuo. We are all the same [people] ("*doushi mosuo*, *doushi yiyang de*" 都是摩梭, 都是一样的).

As indicated above, Lamu Gatusa has observed that Labai Mosuo 'retain matriarchal ideology and display emerging features of patriarchy' (Lamu 2008, p. 114). While we hesitate to characterize patriliny as 'emerging', during our fieldwork, we observed features that were consistent with a better situation for Labai women than in many patrilineal populations in China. The level of gender egalitarianism was high, both in terms of respect for women and gendered division of labor, when we conducted fieldwork in patrilineal Labai in the 2000-2010s. Cultural norms that tend to be associated with patrilineality, including the devaluation of women's status and women's isolation from their natal kin, do not seem to have taken root in Labai. Just as Christine Mathieu had seen in the 1990s, we observed that either parent could be honored at the family's hearth (Mathieu 2003, p. 236). Several women we talked to were responsible for family finances. And, during our fieldwork, a young man in one of the villages where we stayed began a relationship with a woman in a neighboring village, occasionally disappearing at night to visit her, and returning home by dawn. These visits, not so unlike the walking marriages still common in Yongning, were not subject to disapproval so long as they took place before the couple officially married, and were not extramarital relationships (see also Lamu 2008, p. 115).

We also learned of nominally patrilocal marriages that do not conform to expectations of such. For example, a young woman moved back to her natal home with her infant son, explaining that she preferred to stay with her parents (rather than her in-laws) while her husband was working in another region for an extended period. We did not find any stigmatization against the few divorced or

21 Mathieu also points out that kinship terms among Labai Mosuo also reflect a matrilineal ethos: terms for paternal ancestors only go up through father's father (FF), while terms for maternal ancestors exist for two additional generations (MMMM) (Mathieu 2003, pp. 403-404).

widowed women we knew, who moved back to their natal homes with their children and lived in the absence of husbands. And, as Lamu Gatusa points out, there is little stigma against siblings living in the same household (2008, p. 118), which is consistent with prevailing matrilineal norms. Both oral testimonies and household arrangements show that conjugal bonds and patrilocal residence do not discount the important natal bonds with parents and among siblings.

In this sense, we find it pertinent to use what Marie-Francoise Guédon defines as 'matriculture' to characterize patrilineal Mosuo in Labai: to properly understand their social and cultural dynamics requires scholars to forego latent assumptions of patriliny and patriarchy as normative and to read matriliny 'as an entirely different, less hierarchical system in which women play a central role while upholding the importance and value of all members of the society, including men' (Guédon 2020, p. 5). Indeed, from Mosuo creation myths in which female protagonists are glorified to the architectural setup of the Mosuo household today, evidence abounds that patrilineal Mosuo embrace a 'feminine worldview' in which 'women embody not only the divine but also all that is civilized' (Mathieu 2003, p. 402). We conclude based on this evidence that, in spite of their predominantly patrilineal norms and institutions, Mosuo people from Labai share with their Yongning counterparts relatively strong respect for women and deep commitment to their siblings and their children. Matriculture is thus apparent even within a system otherwise dubbed patrilineal.

**Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Directions**

In this article, we examine extant scholarship and ethnographic evidence to trace and explain how Mosuo kinship has adapted to various social, ecological, and political circumstances over time. Our data suggest that the Mosuo developed matrilineal descent and related institutions in deep historical time, following divergence from an ancestral ethnic population that was patrilineal, patrilocal, and engaged in marriage as the primary reproductive union. Our study shows the relevance of contemporary evolutionary theory in analyzing the Mosuo case, which not only expands ethnographic knowledge about the Mosuo but also addresses larger discussions about the conditions favoring transitions to and from matrilineal kinship. Evolutionary explanations focus on how men versus women make use of available resources, both social and natural, and posit various conditions under which men's motivations to contribute significantly to their households as fathers and husbands might be limited. Key among these are conditions that limit paternity certainty or render men peripheral to day-to-day household functioning and conditions that favor equal investments in male and female reproductive careers – or, said differently – do not disproportionately favor male agendas involving control of women and resources. We also reviewed possible explanations for the stability of matriliny using evolutionary theory, which suggest that a convergence of factors, including an expansive land base and the absence of men, likely creates conditions that enables its persistence until today. The re-adoption of patriliny in Labai is likely of much more recent origin, facilitated by conditions that limited the feasibility of walking marriage while requiring consistent inputs of male labor to make household ends meet.

The reversion to or readoption of patriliny that apparently played out in the last two hundred and fifty years following a likely older history of adoption of matriliny from patriliny speaks to two important theoretical and ethnographic points. First, while evolutionism posits a unilineal view of societal progression from matrilineal to patrilineal (Mattison 2010a; Morgan 1964 [1877]; Shenk et al. 2019), the Mosuo have apparently exhibited significant flexibility, transitioning both to and from matriliny in association with different waves of demographic expansion into new environments. While such events have only been described rarely in the ethnographic literature (Murdock 1959; Shenk et al. 2019), this circumstance is anticipated by contemporary evolutionary anthropologists (Mattison, Quinlan, et al. 2019; Shenk et al. 2019) and by ethnographic scholars of kinship criticizing the stagnant essentialism of earlier typological thinking (Sahlins 2011; Schneider 1972; Yanagisako and Collier 1987). The relative rarity of evidence of transitions *to* matrilineal kinship (Shenk et al. 2019; Surowiec et al. 2019) probably has more to do with the limitations and recency of the contemporary historical and ethnographic record than any inherent lack of flexibility in human kinship systems. Indeed, the Asian record has often been overlooked in reconstructions of kinship transitions (Ji et al. 2020). This case study provides additional evidence of recent transitions *to* matriliny in Sino-Tibetan populations, countering historical narratives described in the introduction that transitions to matriliny are rare. Typologies of kinship also overlook the significant flexibility in practices and the more subtle differences in the ways that, for example, patriliny versus matriliny, are enacted across cultures, with important implications for investment patterns and evolutionary theory (Fortunato 2019). To capture transitions more effectively will require more nuanced quantitative metrics associated with a *process* of change and more case studies illustrating the *in situ* ontogeny of transition.

Second, the ethnographic evidence we describe in this article for the transitions to patriliny lands on very similar explanations to those proposed by modern economic and evolutionary scholars, namely: geography and productivity (Holden et al. 2003; Mattison 2011; Mattison, Shenk et al. 2019); labor versus land limitations (Alesina et al. 2013; Mattison, Shenk, et al. 2019); and conflict and cooperation due to variation in household demography (Fortunato 2012; Ji et al. 2013, 2014; Mattison et al. 2018). That certain types of marital practices (e.g., walking marriage) associated with one type of kinship system are constrained by differences in geography (e.g. rugged terrain, long distances between villages) is a novel insight emerging from emic views of the practicalities of daily life. Future work should pay close attention to these narratives, as they can reflect highly localized means of behavioral adaptation while having major implications for family, marital, and even religious practices.

This analysis of transition is subject to various limitations of historical and ethnographic evidence, especially of the patrilineal subpopulation. Although we are relatively confident of the direction of transition *to* and *from* matriliny, respectively (see also Ji et al. 2020), the timing of divergence is uncertain and would be informative of the conditions that are associated with changing kinship institutions. We relied extensively on existing ethnohistorical analyses of these populations to build our understanding of these transitions. These accounts do not always agree; the addition of the genetic and evolutionary perspectives provide complementary evidence that may help to resolve discrepancies (Shenk and Mattison 2011), but genetic data are imperfect and scholars who are not familiar with the vagaries of self- versus other-identified ethnicities may create inappropriate

comparisons (e.g., Healy et al. 2017). Additional studies, including those analyzing different sections of the genome, and studies of archaeological differences between these populations, would aid attempts at historical reconstruction. Our evidence suggests that kinship and identity are both highly flexible and pivot around each other in ways that are not easily predictable without a better understanding of the political, economic, social, and ecological contexts shaping decision-making in both realms. The matrilineal Mosuo and patrilineal Mosuo have been, and continue to be, willing to characterize their practices in terms of absolutes (i.e., 'we do things such and such a way'), but such characterizations change over time and are otherwise belied by variability in actual patterns of behavior and cultural emphases on flexibility when informants are pressed to explain unique kinship configurations.

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**Appendix 1: Tables of Data**

**Table 1. Household composition.** Percentages are column-wise and represent the fraction of households in matrilineal and patrilineal areas with household composition that conforms to various lineal norms. Designations are based on household residents that include descendants of women, only (matrilineal), men, only (patrilineal), both men and women (bilateral), a woman, her partner, and her children, only (nuclear), or other.

| | Matrilineal Area (Yongning) | Patrilineal Area (Labai) |
|---|---|---|
| Matrilineal | 153 (51.0%) | 22 (10.7%) |
| Patrilineal | 47 (15.7%) | 105 (51.2%) |
| Bilateral | 37 (12.3%) | 9 (4.4%) |
| Nuclear | 60 (20.0%) | 68 (33.2%) |
| Other | 3 (1.0%) | 1 (0.5%) |

**Table 2. Post-marital residence at the household level.** Percentages are column-wise and represent the fraction of individuals in matrilineal and patrilineal communities following various locality norms at the household level.

| | Matrilineal Area (Yongning) | Patrilineal Area (Labai) |
|---|---|---|
| Natalocal | 319 (32.8%) | 14 (2.5%) |
| Matrilocal | 161 (16.5%) | 81 (14.6%) |
| Neolocal | 271 (27.8%) | 146 (26.3%) |
| Patrilocal | 223 (22.9%) | 314 (56.6%) |

**Table 3. Migration away from natal communities.** Percentages are row-wise and represent the fraction of males and females migrating away from their natal communities.

| | Matrilineal Area (Yongning) | | Patrilineal Area (Labai) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Left Natal Community | Remain in Natal Community | Left Natal Community | Remain in Natal Community |
| Female | 37 (40.7%) | 54 (59.3%) | 50 (59.5%) | 34 (40.5%) |
| Male | 36 (29.0%) | 88 (71.0%) | 39 (36.4%) | 68 (63.6%) |

**Table 4. Household heads by gender.** Percentages are column-wise and represent the fraction of households in matrilineal and patrilineal areas that are headed by males and females. The household head can serve as a proxy of inheritance, as the head has often assumed authority over inherited property or has established a new household over which they hold authority.

| | **Matrilineal Area (Yongning)** | **Patrilineal Area (Labai)** |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 189 (62.2%) | 53 (24.4%) |
| Male | 115 (37.8%) | 217 (75.6%) |

**Table 5. Household heads by birth order.** Counts represent the number of individuals in each birth order category who are heads of household in each area. Percentages represent the fraction of individuals of a given birth order who became heads of household. The household head can serve as a proxy of inheritance, as the head has often assumed authority over inherited property or has established a new household over which they hold authority.

| | **Matrilineal Area (Yongning)** | **Patrilineal Area (Labai)** |
|---|---|---|
| First | 77 (17.3%) | 53 (19.1%) |
| Only | 8 (11.4%) | 7 (24.1%) |
| Middle | 160 (27.5%) | 93 (30.6%) |
| Last | 59 (14.4%) | 64 (23.7% |

**Table 6. Type of reproductive union.** Percentages are column-wise and represent the relationship status of adult individuals (age>16) in matrilineal and patrilineal areas who follow different marriage norms.

| | **Matrilineal Area (Yongning)** | **Patrilineal Area (Labai)** |
|---|---|---|
| Married | 649 (44.3%) | 614 (71.3%) |
| Never Married | 392 (26.8%) | 245 (28.5%) |
| *Sese* | 424 (28.9%) | 2 (0.2%) |

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# Contemporary Husband-less Societies and Ancient Queendoms of the Sino-Tibetan Marches

**FREDERIQUE DARRAGON**

**Abstract**

*Across the Sino-Tibetan Marches, the many isolated and fiercely independent kingdoms of the past have given way to small ethnic groups with unusual social organizations. The most famous is the 'husbandless' matrilineal society of the Mosuo, which has attracted the attention of scholars as well as Chinese and foreign tourists. This community, however, is not unique: the Zhaba people have similar customs, but their society is still untouched by tourism; other local populations as the Premi, Mi-nyag, and rGyal-rong also used to practice the night-visit-marriage. Women of the region enjoy sexual freedom and their standing is noticeably high. It is certainly worthy of note that this remote region was home to the foreign countries of Nüguo described in the Chinese Imperial records as de facto matriarchal queendoms until 742 CE. Based on both field trips and primary documentary sources, this paper describes the customs, beliefs, and uniqueness of the contemporary matricultures of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands and posits that these societies are descended from ancient queendoms called the Nüguo in Chinese.*

**Keywords**

Matriculture, Matriarchy, Matrilineal, Sino-Tibetan Marches, Marriage-less societies, walking-marriage, visiting-marriage, Mosuo, Zhaba, Mi-nyag, rGyal-rong, Dong Nüguo, Nüguo

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*À travers les marches sino-tibétaines, les nombreux royaumes isolés et farouchement indépendants du passé ont cédé la place à de petits groupes ethniques aux organisations sociales inhabituelles. Le plus célèbre est la société matrilinéaire «sans mari» des Mosuo, qui a attiré l'attention des chercheurs ainsi que des touristes chinois et étrangers. Cette communauté, cependant, n'est pas unique: les habitants de Zhaba ont des coutumes similaires, mais leur société n'a pas encore été touchée par le tourisme; d'autres populations locales telles que les Premi, Mi-nyag et rGyal-rong pratiquaient également le mariage nocturne. Les femmes de la région jouissent de*

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*liberté sexuelle et leur statut social est visiblement élevé. Il est certainement intéressant de noter que cette région éloignée abritait les pays de Nüguo, que les archives impériales chinoises ont décrit jusqu'en 742 de notre ère comme des royaumes de facto matriarcaux. S'appuyant à la fois sur des études sur le terrain et sur des sources documentaires, l'auteure résume les coutumes, les croyances et le caractère unique des matricultures contemporaines des régions frontalières sino-tibétaines et conclut que ces sociétés descendent des 'Nüguo' ou « Pays des Femmes ».*

**Mots-clefs**
Matriculture, matriarcat, matrilinéaire, Marches sino-tibétaines, sociétés sans mariage, mariage-ambulant, mariage-visite, Mosuo, Zhaba, Mi-nyag, rGyal-rong, Dong Nüguo, Nüguo.

*Image 1: Danba, 2001. As may be learned from from the Imperial Chinese Annals, Danba was likely part of the ancient Dong Nüguo.*

## INTRODUCTION

When I first visited Danba in 1996, I was astonished at the numerous tall towers (some unusually star-shaped) jutting from the mountain slopes.[1] I was charmed by the story of the 'river of the tears of the queen of the hot valley', which recounts how the river was created by the queen's

1 In this paper, I generally use Hanyu Pinyin for Chinese words, including place names and other proper nouns. Chinese authors' names are written as customary, with the family name first. Classical Tibetan words are generally transcribed with Wylie.

tears when her queendom was invaded.[2] Today Danba is a county in the eastern Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in western Sichuan Province, China (see Map 1). For over five years, I owned a house overlooking that river. Danba was undoubtedly the seat of the most alluring kingdoms of the past: appealing houses and towers spread over the sides of the mountains where terraced fields and groves entwine. The climate is rather warm, the soil is rich and watered by numerous little springs. In this region, gold was once easy to collect, and earthquakes are rare. The local government, aware of the growing importance of tourism, regularly quarrels with nearby Jinchuan to be considered the site of the ancient capital of the semi-legendary Dong Nüguo (Eastern Queendom),[3] perhaps even the location of the ancient queens' palace.

Having been born privileged in many ways, my life until the late 1990s could be characterized as an enjoyment of the best of both male and female worlds. I had never been a feminist but often tried to help my fellow humans, wild animals, and the environment. Tales about the possibly matriarchal Dong Nüguo were nothing more than stories for me.

My perspective was about to change for three reasons.

Firstly, while I was in Daofu County in 2003 for the purpose of locating any remaining towers,[4] rumors reached my ear of the Zhaba people, who lived among ancient towers and whose society was without marriage. Some months later, I was off to Zhaba. Although my main interest were the towers, I was easily able to ascertain that the Zhaba people have similar customs to the Mosuo of Lugu Lake, and that very many of them lived in matrilineal families without ever getting married.

Secondly, alongside other preparations for the book I was then writing, I asked graduate students of Sichuan University to research and summarize for me the works of Chinese scholars who had researched the towers in ancient Chinese historical texts. At the time, there were only a few isolated mentions of these star-shaped towers in the western scholarship, but I was already aware that tall free-standing towers associated with Wenshan County, north of Chengdu, had been recorded by Chinese scribes around two thousand years ago.[5] To my surprise, the students reported that the towers of the past were practically always mentioned in texts relative to two queendoms called, in ancient Chinese texts, 'Nüguo'(s).[6] More research revealed that these remote frontier countries had pledged allegiance to the Chinese emperor regularly between 586 to 742 CE during the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties. The Chinese annals described them as *de facto* matriarchal societies with most entries stressing the secondary role of men.

Thirdly, there were the personal anecdotes from my boyfriend, a local man whose youthful courtship experiences featured one central element: his happy participation in relationships in which the woman always held the upper hand.

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2 The term *hot* refers to the pleasant climate.
3 Since there is no word for 'queendom' in Chinese, the Chinese term *Dong Nüguo* is usually translated as *Eastern Women's Kingdom*. In fact, it means *Eastern Queendom*.
4 Today, Daofu County is part of Ganzi Prefecture. In ancient Chinese documents such as the *Book of Sui*, Vol. 83, Bio. 48, it was mentioned as the Fu Kingdom and described as having many towers.
5 Sun Hongkai, 'A Preliminary Investigation into the Relationship between Qionglong and the Languages of the Qiang Branch of Tibeto-Burman', in *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, Vol.12-1 (University of California, 1989), 95.
6 Words do not have a plural form in Chinese. I will write Nüguo(s) to designate more than one queendom.

His respectful behavior combined with my visit to Zhaba and information from primary sources raised two inevitable questions shaping this paper: Were these queendoms a historical reality, and was my boyfriend's attitude inherited from a different culture – a culture in which women were not subservient to men? My explorations into these questions form the substance of this article, confirming my understanding that the Nüguo(s) were historical matriarchies, and that remnants of their mores are still existing today among several matricultural societies of the Sino-Tibetan Marches.

I soon discovered that although a few sinologists had devoted some attention to these realms and their description in Chinese ancient texts, the implications of their existence had not been integrated into the western Academia discourse.[7] Occasional Chinese studies were discarded by Western academics because of matriarchy's early connection with the now discredited Bachofen-Morgan-Engels cultural evolutionary theory and its link with Marxist communism. Only Christine Mathieu has acknowledged that, because of these primary sources and other facts which she had unearthed, the question of matriarchy needs to be re-visited.[8] Was this academic void incidental or was it the case, as Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban had once told me, that 'asking certain questions [related to matriarchy] has been enough to destroy careers'?[9]

There is no such reticence to ideas of matriarchy in the Chinese cultural and academic sphere. Although Chinese society has been strongly patriarchal for millennia, Chinese cultural perspectives are also embedded in the enduring influence of the Yinyang concept, which gives parity to the feminine *yin* in all life's manifestations. This concept supported the Communist Party's adoption of Engels' theories about primitive matriarchies having given way to orderly patriarchal civilizations. Chinese scholars have often acknowledged that, in their ancient texts, it is written 'in the past children knew their mother and not their fathers'.[10]

This implication of matriarchal powers held by proto-Chinese women is echoed in the pivotal roles, destructive might, and vast powers given to female deities at the oldest strata of Chinese mythology. Yang Lihui and An Deming, among others, note that the goddess Nüwa created the human race out of clay and went on to be a cosmic savior by reafixing the sky, which had fallen on the earth. They write that "Nüwa is the Great Mother of humans, a culture heroine and one of the most important and powerful primeval goddess in Chinese mythology."[11] By the time of the more

7 In her admirable and monumental work, Heide Göttner-Abendroth evokes 'queens' realms' of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands through the lens of her concept of matriarchy, including them with matrilineal societies of peace; she mistakenly identifies them as Tibetan and dates them from the eighth to sixth centuries BCE. The historical records mention the queendoms from 445 to 742 CE, and specify that they were often engaged in wars. After being invaded by Tibet, the queendoms became kingdoms. Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Cultures Across the Globe*, trans. Karen Smith (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012/2013), 86-104.

8 Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland –Naxi and Mosuo* (UK, USA, and Canada: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 28. Mathieu does not imply that such matriarchies were a necessary stage of human evolution.

9 Personal communication, 2013.

10 Kwang-Chih Chang, *Art, Myth and Ritual: the Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 9. This is also written in ancient Greek texts: see Badis, The ancient Greek Family, *Social Science*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (June 1964) pp 156-175 (Pi Gamma Mu, International Honor Society in Social Sciences 1964)

11 Yang Lihui and An Deming, with Jessica Anderson Turner, *Handbook of Chinese Mythology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 170.

patriarchal Zhou Dynasty (approx. 1046 – 314 BCE), Nüwa was married to her brother Fuxi;[12] together they were credited with inventing marriage and re-creating humans after a big flood.[13]

Sinologists such as Léon Vandermeersch and Anne Birrell, among others,[14] believe that the added relevance bestowed on Fuxi (previously known as Paoxi) and his marriage with Nüwa indicates a strengthening patriarchal society and the diminishing role of matricultures in China's past. This change in social structure is backed by archeological finds. Kwang-Chih Chang, for example, writes that the sequence of burial sites in the Chinese coastal Neolithic shows increasing wealth and social differentiation and a decline in the status of women and children.[15]

Claiming three thousand years of continuity in the written language, Chinese scholarship has access to historical data reaching back millennia. Essential documentary material for this research was obtained from the accounts written by imperial clerks assisting Emperors, as well as some regional reports on the area written during the period under study. Moreover, as illustrated by Eberhard, archaic customs and ancient cultural beliefs and behaviors have persisted amongst various minority peoples to this present day [16]

*Image 2: This third- to eighth-century silk banner, unearthed in Dunhuang, features Nüwa (left) typically holding a compass symbolizing the circular sky while Fuxi holds a square representing the square earth. Their symmetry evokes Yinyang symbolism. © National Museum of Korea*

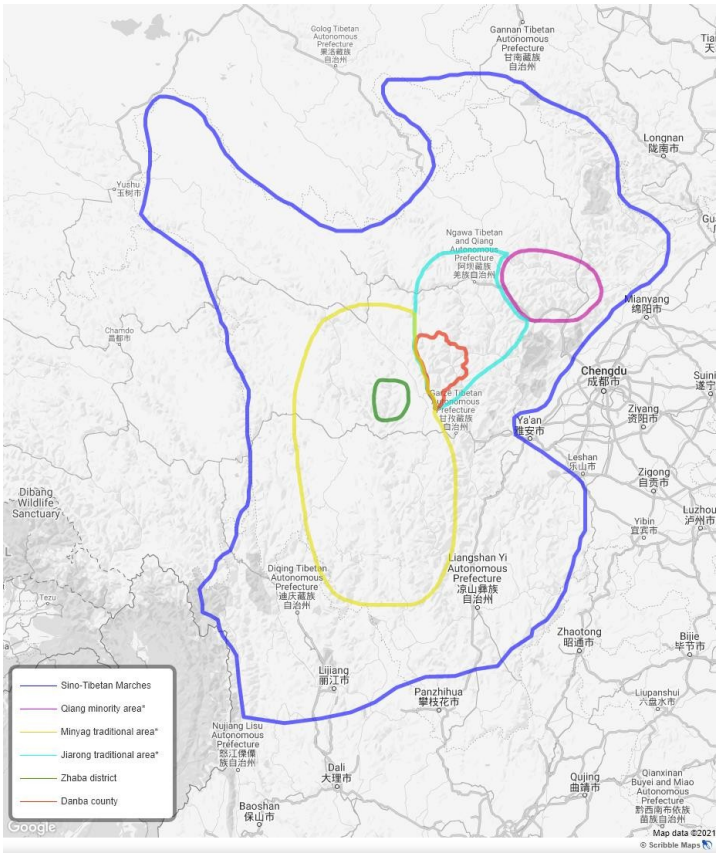
A brief word about definitions: I do not accept Göttner-Abendroth's interpretation of the term *matriarchy* to mean 'the mothers from the beginning.'[17] Rather, I believe that the word matriarchy should be used in both its etymological and its standard meaning: the power of mothers, and signifying a reverse of patriarchy – a socio-political system in which women hold political and economic power explicitly over men.[18] Other scholars support this view, among them Christine Mathieu and Siobhán Mattison,[19] although it appears that matriarchy is something of a taboo topic in today's anthropological studies. Hereafter, I use *matriarchy* to mean 'rule by women'.

12 Prof. Léon Vandermeersch, personal communications, 2017, 2018 and 2019.
13 Yang and An, 173.
14 Personal communications with Vandermeersch; Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 44-5 and 164; Edward H. Schafer, *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in Tang Literature* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), 29.
15 Chang, 116.
16 Eberhard, Wolfram, *The local culture of south and east China*, trans. Alide Eberhard (Leiden: Brill, 1968). See also Yang Fuquan 'Political transformation and love suicide among the Naxi People' in this volume.
17 Göttner-Abendroth, XV-XVI.
18 See *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/matriarchy [accessed 03/27/2020].
19 See Mathieu, 2003, and Siobhán Mattison et al, 'The evolution of female-biased kinship in humans and other mammals', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B.* Vol. 374, Issue 1780 (2019), 5. Available: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2019.0007 [Accessed 05/21/2020].

## THE SINO-TIBETAN MARCHES AND THE CLASSICAL POLYANDRY REGION

Today, the Sino-Tibetan Marches are also known as the *Qiang-Tibetan-Yi Corridor* or the *Tribal Corridor*. The area corresponds roughly to western Sichuan and northwest Yunnan, and can be divided into three general cultural areas with very permeable frontiers (see Map 1). The land northwest of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, is mainly inhabited by people of Qiang nationality (i.e. contemporary Qiang), while the area surrounding and to the west of Xichang, is home to the Yi nationality.[20] The rest of the region belongs to the Tibetan cultural sphere, which has integrated cultural influences from China, India, Nepal and Persia. In addition of parts of Sichuan and Yunnan, the Tibetan area of cultural influence encompasses all of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, parts of Gansu and most of Qinghai provinces, as well as the country of Bhutan, parts of Nepal, and areas on the Indian side of the Himalayas.

The inhabitants of this area, sometimes called the classical polyandry region,[21] belong to a diversity of ethnic and linguistic groups. Most of these peoples practice Buddhism or Bon, often combined with a form of animist religion. These faiths, contrary to Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, view marriage and having children as personal and individual decisions. By and large, in these mountainous and remote lands, the type of marriage chosen depends on circumstances. All types of marriage are acceptable, including the lack thereof. William Rockhill, who traveled in the region under consideration in this paper, wrote in 1891 that 'temporary marriages are recognized, (...) and are not held immoral, we may safely assert that, as regards their marriage relations, this people are little removed from promiscuity, which is but indefinite polyandry joined with indefinite polygamy'.[22]




*Map 1: Contemporary 'Sino-Tibetan Marches' and areas of ancient towers. Although impossible to identify precisely, traditional areas (*) are based on architectural remains of towers marked by specific ethnic architectural styles dating from the eleventh century onward. All depictions are approximate. Map based on Darragon 2015, with additional information provided by Darragon. © Rowlatt 2021*

20 The People's Republic of China is a self-declared multinational state of fifty-six nationalities (*minzu*), among which, broadly speaking, the Han account for 91% of the total population. Fifty-five minority nationalities (*xiaosu minzu*) account for the remaining people, 9% of the population.

21 Katherine E. Starkweather and Raymond Hames, 'A Survey of Non-Classical Polyandry', *Human Nature: An Interdisciplinary Biosocial Perspective*, Volume 23, Number 2, (2012), 150.

22 William Rockhill, *The Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey Through China, Mongolia, and Tibet* (New York: The Century Company, 1891), 212. Today, local people are usually very reluctant to discuss their sexual experiences and customs. I tell them from the start that I have never married and, as many other privileged French Baby Boomers, have had very numerous lovers. That usually sets the tone for a rather lively interview.

Throughout history, however, the Sino-Tibetan Marches were a tribal corridor of challenging terrain, where indigenous tribes, invaders, traders, and bandits intermingled to create fiercely independent territorialities whose allegiances oscillated between China and Tibet. Such oscillations earned them the sobriquet 'two-face Qiang' (两面羌) from the Tang Dynasty scribes (618–907 CE).[23]

Today, many peoples of the Marches officially belong to the Tibetan *nationality*, which also includes many practitioners of Buddhism and Bon who do not speak a Tibetan language. Numerous languages found in this region are mutually unintelligible, with some of Qiangic origins forming their own branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Regarding Tibetic languages, three are in general use: Khamba, associated with the area known as Kham (also called Eastern Tibet by Westerners); Amdo, used by the people who live in the traditional Tibetan province of Amdo (which broadly corresponds to today's Qinghai Province) and by most high altitude nomads; and third, Lhasa Tibetan, spoken by learned lamas and some erudite individuals. When folks from one valley cannot understand folks from the next, Mandarin Chinese or its Sichuan dialect is often the *lingua franca*.[24] Except for the Yi script, used by the Yi nationality people, there are no full-fledged local written languages; however, quite a few ancient ritual scripts, such as the Geba, Dongba and Ersu Shaba, are still in use.

Independently of their tongue and their religious beliefs, the inhabitants of the Tribal Corridor have many similar customs which today may be generally identified as 'Qiang' including cultural markers that, as we will see below, are quite different from those of Central Tibet or Amdo. Indeed, Chinese historians have called this region the 'Qiang belt' [25] and generally agree that many of the people inhabiting this corridor are the descendants of the Qiang tribes recorded in the Chinese documents between the first and the eight century, who adopted either systematized Bon or Lamaism after being overrun by the Tibetan Empire (ca. 618-842 CE).

This is the region where ancient freestanding tall towers, many of them star-shaped, still stand today. I was able to establish that, in Sichuan, these towers can be classified in three groups based on their architectural style. Each style is roughly associated with one of three territories: the lands of the Jiarong (Tib. *rGyal-rong*), the Mi-nyag, and the Qiang nationality. Towers of the Minyag style are also found in Zhaba and Daofu regions (see Map 1).[26] A fourth style of towers can also be found in what were once two contiguous small kingdoms of eastern Central Tibet, Nyangpo and Kongpo.[27]

Besides the towers, the peoples of this region also share a number of cultural features, customs, rituals and domestic structures. Traditional homes are built around one or two sacred pillars. If duo, the columns symbolize the house lineage of males and females; if single, the pillar often

23 *Old Book of Tang*, Vol. 197, Bio. 147, section Dong Nüguo. https://www.djqxx.com.cn/bookview/7654.html
24 My personal observations are supported by Koen Wellens, *Religious Revival in the Tibetan Borderlands: The Premi of Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 14.
25 See Wang Ming-Ke, 'From the Qiang Barbarians to the Qiang Nationality: The Making of a New Chinese Boundary', in *Imaging China: Regional Division and National Unity*, eds. Shu-Min Huang and Chung-Kuang Hsu (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, 2000), 47-8.
26 Frederique Darragon, *Secret Towers of the Himalayas* (documentary film available on Discovery Channel, 2003) and *Secret Towers of the Himalayas* (Shenzhen: Shenzhen Media Group Publishing House, 2005).
27 Frederique Darragon, 'On the Ancient Cross-shaped Towers of Nyangpo and Kongpo in Eastern Central Tibet' in *Journal of Comparative Cultural Studies in Architecture*, Homage to André Alexander, Issue 2015 (8), 34-50. Available: http://www.jccs-a.org/issues.

represents the house matriarch. As metaphors for the family line, the pillars have to be positioned with the top part of the trunk towards the sky to enable the family to grow.[28] Traditionally, family names do not exist in this area; individuals are known by their house name and a given name (the latter may be bestowed by a lama).[29]

Until recently, the great majority of houses used a three-legged sacred fireplace sanctifying bilateral kinship and implying a rare occurrence of horizontal tripartite division of space.[30] This artifact, in which each leg is sacred in its own right, expresses household harmony (see Image 3). It is typically associated with Qiang cultural modes, but as I discovered during my fieldwork, it is also found in ancient Austronesian dwellings. This three-legged fireplace is also an expression of fire-worship and the sacredness of the burning fire represents the vigor of the family.[31]

*Image 3: Close-up of a Jiarong sacred three-legged fire place, this one with an offering near the fire-god's leg.*

White stones are sacred and ubiquitous, reminders of a Qiang myth in which white stones enabled Qiang ancestors to defeat the previous inhabitants of the land.[32] Even if people have adopted Lamaism or Bon (the latter is often confused with the Black Hat sect of Buddhism by the people of the Marches), they are likely to practice a combination of these creeds along with their ancient animist faiths. They consult shamans and mediums, who are sometimes women, as well as lamas. There is a belief that dead kin influence the fortune of the living, and Chinese-style altars to the ancestors may also be found, generally side-by-side with Buddhist memorabilia and a Mao Zedong poster.[33]

It is also in the Marches that missionaries, travelers, and anthropologists have encountered or evoked historical queens.[34] Tso-mu lists nine principalities with female rulers in modern times alone.[35] Mathieu notes that female chiefs were recorded among the nearby people of Yezhi and possibly also among the Mosuo.[36]

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28 Personal observations and Wellens, 224.
29 Personal observations; Mathieu, personal communication, 2020; Wellens, 113; and Rockhill, 213.
30 Frederique Darragon, 'The Civilization of the Star-shaped Towers as a Legacy of the Ancient Qiang Tribes', presented in Chinese by Sun Ji at the 2008 Conference *Protecting Heritage after the Earthquake*, National Architecture Institute of China and Construction Bureau of Shanxi Province (Tai Yuan, Shanxi Province); Frederique Darragon, 'Ancient Fire God and its Lingering Presence in Southeast Asia,' *Journal of Comparative Cultural Studies in Architecture*, 2015 (7), Air-Fire, 41-2; available: http://www.jccs-a.org/issues.
31 Darragon, 2015 (7), 45.
32 Rolf-Alfred Stein, *Les K'iang des Marches Sino-Tibétaines*, Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, Ve section (Paris, 1956), 4 and 11.
33 Personal observations and Kellens, 119-87.
34 For a list of these encounters, see Frederick William Thomas, *Nam, an Ancient Language of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 17.
35 Yudru Tsomu, 'Women as Chieftains in Modern Kham History,' *Inner Asia*, Volume 20, Issue 1 (2018), 124-5.
36 Mathieu, 406-7.

***Ancient Qiang, Qiang tribes and today's Qiang Nationality (Qiang Zu)***

The ancient Chinese ideogram for 'Qiang' has been found on hundreds of Chinese oracle bones starting from the 13th century BCE, where it identifies a people at war with the early Chinese.[37] Today, however, Chinese and Western scholars are in agreement that until the Han Dynasty, *Qiang* was a blanket term used for all those living west of a then-small China, and was never a term of self-reference.

In recent decades, linguists have come to the conclusion that many of the languages spoken in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands belong to a distinct language group within the Sino-Tibetan language family which they call Qiangic. DNA testing also supports the view that the contemporary Qiang nationality has the longest ancestry in the corridor, as Qiang individuals who carry the O3-M117 haplogroup have the greatest genetic diversity among the Sino-Tibetan Marches' population.[38]

Ancient Chinese texts refer to the Qiang as barbarians who dread not being cremated.[39] Without princes, ministers, or magistracies, they are described as constantly at war with each other and regularly plundering their neighbors; some children are said to use the name of their father, others that of their mother.[40] Through history there are records of Qiang carrying out the sacrifice of white sheep and monkeys.[41]

During the Han Dynasties (202 BCE–220 CE), Chinese scribes began recording the names of distinct Qiang tribes, and to refer to some as the Qiang-Di tribes; all were described as having origins in the Qinghai-Gansu area.[42] The seventh-century *Book of Sui* comments that Qiang tribes descended from the Sanmiao originated from *mi* monkeys;[43] Stein and Eberhard confirm the antiquity of this legend.[44] Although the Qiang people may have belonged to different tribes, they appear, through history, to have shared a common culture based on white sheep sacrifices, a monkey ancestor, and cremation of the dead.

One tribe specifically identified by the Han scribes, the Ranmang, was known for residing in tall towers. The *Book of the Later Han* mentions that the Ranmang are organized in matrilineal clans and women are held in high esteem.[45] According to famed Chinese linguist Sun Hongkai, the Ranmang are now regarded by Chinese historians as the ancestors of the contemporary Qiang

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37 *K'iang* and *Ch'iang* are earlier Western transliterations of the Chinese modern character 羌, now written *Qiang* in Hanyu Pinyin.

38 Longli Kang Longli *et al*, 'Y-chromosome O3 Haplogroup Diversity in Sino-Tibetan Populations Reveals Two Migration Routes into the Eastern Himalayas in Annals of Human Genetics', *Annals of Human Genetics*, Wiley Online Library, 23 November 2011; available: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1469-1809.2011.00690.x/pdf [Accessed 03/25/2012] and Wei Deng *et al*, 'Evolution and Migration History of the Chinese Population Inferred from Chinese Y-chromosome evidence', *The Journal of Human Genetics*, 49 (2004), 339-48, available: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs10038-004-0154-3.pdf [accessed 09/10/2012].

39 Stein, 1956, 4; David C. Graham, *The Customs and Religion of the Ch'iang*, 16 plates, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, Vol 135, No. 1 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1958), 135 7.

40 Thomas, 39; this probably indicates a mix of patrilineal and matrilineal tribes.

41 Stein, 1956, 8-10; Graham, 97.

42 Graham, 4; Li Jiawei *et al*, 'Ancient DNA reveals genetic connections between early Di-Qiang and Han Chinese', *BMC Evolutionary Biology* 17 (2017), 239, available: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12862-017-1082-0.

43 *Book of Sui*, Vol. 83, Bio. 48, available: http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/suisu/sui_083.htm [accessed 01/19/20].

44 Stein, 1956, 5; Eberhard, 1968, 51-3.

nationality.[46] During the Sui (581-618 CE) and Tang dynasties (618-907 CE), the Qiang tribes dispersed, mostly fleeing from the expansion of the Tibetan empire.[47] However, many of their descendants have retained their Qiangic language and a distinct identity. Among them are the Dangxiang Qiang who refer to themselves as Mi-nyag (see below). Today, the people of the Qiang nationality grow crops and often continue to live in fortified villages. They also have kept their original animistic religion, which may resemble early Bon.[48] They worship many gods, along with a monkey creator linked with their shamans and their creation myth.[49] Their shamans continue to use sheep scapula for divination and, until recently, most Qiang insisted on being cremated.[50]

As surprising as it may be, because monkeys do resemble humans, monkey ancestors are extremely rare in the cosmogonic mythologies of people around the world. Yet, it is common to seventeen of the fifty-six Chinese national minorities, albeit with local variations. As recorded by Professor Li Shaoming, the Qiang creation myth goes as follows:

> A long time ago, there was a mountain linking the sky to the earth. Mu Jiezhu, the youngest daughter of a god, came to earth to play. Soon she encountered a tiger wanting to eat her, but Dou Anzhu, a shepherd monkey-fur boy saved her. She returned to the sky with her savior, wishing to marry him, but her father only agreed to her marriage on the condition of the monkey-fur boy's accomplishment of three impossible tasks. With the assistance of Mu Jiezhu and other divinities she summoned, the boy succeeded. The two young people got married and went back to earth accompanied by various domestic plants and animals, but Mu Jiezhu's father severed the connection between earth and sky.[51]

This tale resembles the Mosuo creation myth as recounted by Mathieu,[52] as well as pre-Buddhist stories and legends of Tibetan kings and cultural heroes whose mothers or wives came from the divine rMu branch.[53] The divine origin of a female ancestor likely denotes a matricentric cosmogony and a society in which women often have a higher position. However, under the

45 *Book of the Later Han*, vol. 86, Nan Man Xi Nan Yi, section 71; available at https://ctext.org/hou-han-shu/nan-man-xi-nan-yi-lie-zhuan [accessed 6/10/20].
46 Sun, 1989, 95.
47 George Van Driem, *Languages of the Himalayas* (Leiden, Boston and Koln: Brill, 2001), 443
48 See also Mathieu, 97-142, where she argues convincingly that the Dongba religion of the Naxi, also believed to be of Qiang origins, is related to ancient Bon.
49 Graham, 97; Stein, 1956, 8-10.
50 Graham, 41; Stein, 1956, 4.
51 Li Shaoming, 'Investigation of Xishan Qiang People at the time of Tang Dynasty', in *Journal of Sichuan University*, 1980 [available only in Chinese]. This information and the reference were provided to me in 2013 by Sun Ji, who was then working for the Unicorn Foundation, an American private foundation that I created in 2001 to document, record, and protect the minority cultures of southwestern China. We also built a few schools, one mountain road, three small mountain bridges, a couple of water systems, and sponsored higher education for youngsters, among other things. It is now inactive.
52 Mathieu, 400-2.
53 Stein, 1961, 55-6. In the Tibetan Tradition, rMu (also dMu) was, among other things, the name of a divine clan of ancestors.

influence of either Buddhism[54] or traditional Chinese patriarchal norms,[55] women's ritual and social position was devaluated. In David Graham's list of the contemporary Qiang nationality pantheon, Qiang divinities are practically all males. While Qiang women are well respected within their houses and are generally older than their husbands, they cannot participate in rituals; pregnant and menstruating women are considered polluted. Furthermore, there are no shamans or priests among the contemporary Qiang nationality.[56]

***The Geba (Keba, Kepa) of Shanyan***

The Geba people live in difficult to access, isolated mountain villages above 3500 meters on both sides of the Yangtse River.[57] They speak a dialect of the Khamba language. In 2005, I was the first Westerner to visit upper Shanyan.

Marriage customs among the Geba are clearly polyandrous: each house is inhabited by two or three brothers married to a single wife. I was also told that many women had found life too difficult on the mountain and departed for the valleys. Women are not considered members of the Geba tribe, which traditionally traces its ancestry to three brothers.

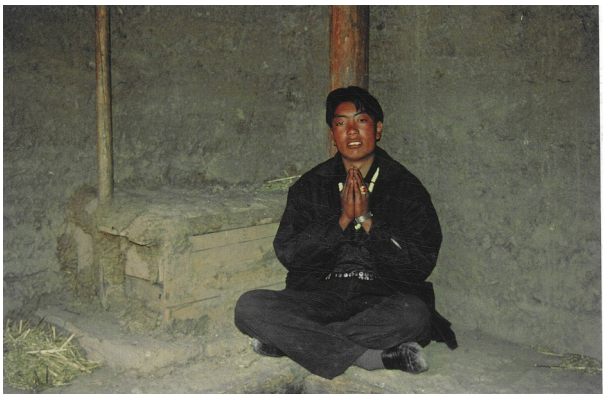


*Image 4: Geba seating near his grand-mother's coffin in a room of his house; at times ancestors are buried inside a wall.*

Despite this, when any member of the community, male or female, dies after having reached 85 years or more and has at least one grandchild, she or he is embalmed and buried in the walls of the house, becoming a near divinity. It is possible that such customs were once widespread as people from other regions of the Marches have informed me that when they rebuild their houses they often find bones believed to be those of their ancestors. Traditionally, this rebuilding occurs every three or four generations.

54 It is now well-established that the famous Tibetan creation myth of Avalokiteśvara (embodied in a monkey) and the lustful demoness of the rocks has received an 'overtly Buddhist treatment' (Roberto Vitali 'Tribes Which Populated the Tibetan Plateau, As Treated in the Texts Collectively Called the Khungs chen po bzhi,' in *Cosmogony and Their Origins*, special issue, Lungta 16 (Spring 2013), 37n1). It is a rather recent tale whose literary form dates from the eleventh century (Gyal-bo *et al*, *Civilization at the Foot of Mt. Sham-po: the royal house of lHa Bug- pa-can and the History of g,Ya'- bzang* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 51n40). As we saw on p. 126, the seventh-century *Book of Sui* commented that some Qiang tribes considered themselves to be descended from monkeys; this seems to indicate that the above-mentioned Tibetan myth probably originated in the earlier Qiang myth. As masterfully depicted by Janet Gyatso, another infamous Tibetan myth is also misogynistic: that of the supine-positioned *Srin-mo* demoness, whose vast vast body constituted the whole land of Tibet and who had to be pinned down by thirteen monasteries before Buddhism could flourish in Tibet (Janet Gyatso, 'Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet', *The Tibet Journal*, Special Issue on Women and Tibet, 12:4 (Winter 1987), 38-53. The moral of these myths is similar to that of the western myths of Eve and Pandora, in which females' lewdness brought disaster to the human race. The Tibetan myths also demonstrate that Tibet's land divinity was female and that she had to be subdued before the introduction of a (patriarchal) religion. And, as Gyatso writes, this suggests that women held a powerful place in early Tibetan society.

55 For decades the Qiang have mixed with Han Chinese and today more than half of the Qiang are unable to speak their own language.

56 Graham, 44.

57 The Geba people have no relation to the Geba Naxi script.

This burial custom indicates a glorification of fertile ancestors and fertility in general. After about twenty years the bones are retrieved and either thrown in the river (river-burial) or put in an urn and buried.

As I have witnessed, tree-burial is practiced for small children and other deceased are given to vultures in a sky-burial.

## MARRIAGE-LESS SOCIETIES

### *Mosuo and some neighboring peoples*

The Mosuo of Lugu Lake in the Yongning region are well-known as a matrilineal husband-less society: a flourishing contemporary matriculture.[58] They have a matricentric pantheon,[59] and despite numerous efforts by the Chinese government to promote or even enforce contractual marriage in the past, many Mosuo families still favor marriage-less family arrangements. Men visit their lovers at night in a practice known as *ti se se*, or 'walking relationship', before returning to their matrilineal house to work and otherwise spend time with their natal families. There is general social acceptance for both women and men having many lovers successively or nearly simultaneously, but, as the woman needs to allow the man to enter her room, the decision rests with her. Jealousy is uncommon, and, as Mathieu notes, paternity is largely irrelevant.[60] Children all belong to the matrilineal communal house, which passes from one generation of women to the next, although if there is a dramatic imbalance between boys and girls during one generation, young boys or young girls may be adopted or eventually exchanged between relatives.[61]

Many rules establish clear incest taboos within the family group and between matrilineal kin; these rules, however, do not apply to patrilineal relatives, unless they are known siblings. In a 2013 paper, Wu *et al* define these arrangements as similar to cases of communal reproduction that may be found in other duolocal social systems, where neither sex disperses; males go outside of the group to find partners and females have sexual relationship with outsiders.[62] Tourism has become an important source of income for the Mosuo population, and Chinese local and central governments are now happy to promote Mosuo traditional sexual customs by allowing the folks to do as they please. The so-called promiscuous character of these arrangements is often denied by local officials and scholars in order to discourage sexual tourism by outsiders.[63]

Some Chinese scholars have argued that the Mosuo marriage-less custom was imposed by local chieftains (Ch. *Tusi*) of the Yongning feudal system, who themselves did marry in order to transmit their title, and eventually their wealth, to their sons.[64] Mathieu posits that the Yongning feudal

58 Mosuo from other regions, such as Labei, may marry. Mathieu, 237.
59 Mathieu, personal communications, 2020.
60 Mathieu, 237.
61 Mathieu, personal communications, 2020.
62 Wu Jiajia, He Qiaoqiao, Deng Lingling, Wang Shichang, Ruth Mace, Ji Ting, and Tao Yi, 'Communal breeding promotes a matrilineal social system where husband and wife live apart,' *Proceedings of the Royal Society B, Biological Sciences*, May 2013. Available: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rspb.2013.0010 (accessed 10 September 2014).
63 Personal observations.
64 Mathieu, 399.

lords saw some advantage in the marriage-less system in their efforts to curb inter-clan alliances and warfare.[65] William Divale reasoned that patrilocal residence allows for the fraternal interest groups associated with feuding and internal wars.[66] However, recent research has deemed war of little relevance as a cause for transition to or from matrilineality.[67]

Significantly, until recently, populations close to the Mosuo had or still have similar customs, as discussed below. For example, the special issue of *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* devoted to Chinese Research on Matrilineal / Matriarchal Systems in Minority Societies describes close to twenty cases of past and present societies of Southern China, most of them matrilineal.[68] Among them, women were hardly ever harmed during feuds. Men are often portrayed as 'passing fathers' who could be ordered out of the house at any time, with no obligation to raise their children.

As another brief example, in his 2010 book, Wellens writes of the Premi people of Wenquan, Sichuan, that many there also practice the night visits instead of marriage.[69] Wellens questions the antiquity of this custom. He cites sources mentioning a ruling in 1863 by a local Tusi forbidding, even if the woman refuses to marry, the then customary Premi practice of killing babies born out of wedlock.[70] Certainly the new rule was necessary to enable a system of visiting relationships. However, it is worth noting that there is no specific word for marriage in the Premi language.[71] This may indicate that marriage and ideas about paternal legitimacy were relatively recent introductions and that Premi society had once followed marriage-less modes similar to neighboring communities.

***Upper Zhaba***

The Upper Zhaba people live above 2500 meters in remote villages clinging to mountain slopes overlooking the Xianshui River, a tributary of the Yalong River.[72] In 2004, it took our four-wheel-drive car four hours to drive the eighty kilometers from Yajiang City to the small township of Upper Zhaba. From there, most of the Zhaba villages were accessible only by foot. At the time, there was electricity but no cellular phone service.

65 Ibid., 395-6.
66 William Divale, *Matrilocal Residence in Pre-Literate Society* (Ann Arbour, MI: UMI Research Press, 1973).
67 Mary K. Shenk *et al*, 'When does matriliny fail? The frequencies and causes of transitions to and from matriliny estimated from a de novo coding of a cross-cultural sample,' *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B.*, Vol. 374, Issue 1780 (2019), 2-4, 9-10, 13. Available: https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rstb.2019.0006 [Accessed 06/06/2020].
68 Guo Xiaolin, editor and translator, *Chinese Sociology & Anthropology: A Journal of Translations*, special issue on Chinese Research on Matrilineal / Matriarchal Systems in Minority Societies, 25:4 (1993).
69 Wellens, 190. The Premi are classified among the Tibetan *nationality*.
70 Ibid, 257n3.
71 Ibid, 97.
72 In Tibetan, this river is called 'Nyag'-chu and its valley Nyag-rong. The Mi-nyag tribes have been observed along it shores for almost 15 centuries. Rolf-Alfred Stein, 'Mi-ñag et Si-hia. Géographie historique et légendes ancestrales', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient,* Tome 44, N°1, (1951) : 223-5.

*Image 6: Villages in Upper Zhaba, 2005.*

Although the Zhaba people are officially classed as members of the Tibetan nationality by the central government, Zhaba customs are similar to those of the Mosuo. Tourism, however, which has been deemed impractical and has been discouraged by the government, is nonexistent. As a result, Zhaba folks are not especially self-conscious about their matricultural way of life. In her 2010 book about the Zhaba, Feng Min reports that at the time of her 2004 residence in Zhaba, approximately half of the families were marriage-less matrilineal families.[73] Personal communications with Zhaba people confirm Feng's observation that when a family has only adult women, a place in the household will be offered to a well-liked man; if all the younger people are males, an important lover of one of the boys will be invited to become a permanent resident of the house. These couples will be given their own room.[74] Since this situation usually lasts only one generation, Feng counted these families as matrilineal families. Like the Mosuo, it is important for Zhaba families to maintain a balanced sex ratio in their households for work, as well as biological and social reproduction, because some work is traditionally done by men and a house without girls will die. Personal communication with elders confirms that the adoption of young boys or girls to create balance in households was common in the past, not only in Zhaba, but all over remote areas of the Marches.

In their 2010 paper, Feng and Roche cite Zhao Liufang, who conducted fieldwork in Zhaba in 1930, as writing "There is no marriage; marriage does not exist. Anyone can be anyone else's husband

73 Feng Min, 扎巴藏族—21 世纪人类学母系制社会田野调查》, *Zhaba Tibetans--A Field Survey of Matriarchal Society of Anthropology in the 21st Century* (National Publishing House, 2010) [available in Chinese only]. See also Feng Min and Gerald Roche, 'Matrilineal Marriage in Tibetan areas in western Sichuan Province', trans. Mtsho mo skyid, *Asian Highlands Perspective* 6 (2010), 254.
74 Personal communications with local people; Feng & Roche, 2010, 252-8.

and anyone can be anyone else's wife. Such is their rule and their customs." Lovers call each other *gayi* (beloved) and night-visits among the Zhaba comes with an interesting feature, one which may confirm the Zhaba people as direct cultural descendants of the famed Dong Nüguo.[75] Unlike Mosuo single-story houses, Zhaba stone houses have three or four floors; this minimizes their footprint and conserves arable land. Men sleep on the top floor and women of all ages sleep in the kitchen, usually located on the second floor. Unlike Mosuo women, Zhaba women do not have separate rooms and a lover of one may, eventually, also make love with one of her sisters or her mother - only, of course, with everybody's agreement.[76] To access the second-floor window, meanwhile, a prospective lover needs to climb the outside wall. Tower climbing is somewhat seen as a test for manhood.

In 2002, a television crew went to Zhaba and filmed a wall-climbing competition between two professional mountain climbers and two local youngsters. The Zhaba boys won. Unfortunately, copies of this film are not easily available. However, in 2010, I had the opportunity to interview the two local boys: Baji Dengzhi and Siliang Wengxiu. By that time, wall-climbing was becoming a thing of the past as old houses with cracked walls were replaced by new houses with smooth walls. The ubiquity of cellular phones following the recent installation of a signal tower also meant that men could easily inform their lovers of their arrival. The two boys, now in their thirties, had not married; each of them expressed enjoyment of the closeness and support of their respective matrilineal families while delighting in the special love of their *gayi* relationships. Both men told me that they regretted the passing of wall-climbing, when their superior climbing skills made them very popular, as girls would generally refuse a man who was not able to climb the wall to her window at least a few times. Ancient texts make frequent mentions that queens of the Nüguo(s) lived in towers that were nine stories high. Possibly they too selected their lovers according to their climbing skills.

*Image 7: From left to right, author, a local woman, and Cizhu Qupi seated around the sacred three-legged fireplace of aZhaba household. On the wall is a Buddhist Zambala.*

Even in the past, though, not everybody wanted numerous relationships. Cizhu Qupi, a retired school teacher and Upper Zhaba representative at the township level, told me that he and his wife have never had any other lovers. They fell in love as youngsters and had four children, but were only able to move in together once their mothers – the heads of their respective matrilineal households - had passed away. By personal choice, none of their children follows the local marriage-less tradition. Other monogamous marriages are often the result of a transition away from matrifocal behavior that began during the 1980s, initiated with a government policy that required every woman who has a child to have a marriage certificate. Nevertheless, individuals were still permitted to live in the kind of family arrangement

75 Darragon, 2005, 55.
76 Personal communications with Pema and SZ (this last name was shortened to preserve anonymity), 2010.

they preferred, the right to preserve customs being safeguarded in Article 4 of the Chinese Constitution.[77]

Lower Zhaba, located further down on the Xianshui River, lost its marriage-less traditions long ago and today, Upper Zhaba is not as isolated as it once was. As Cizhu Qupi explained to me in 2010, the subsistence economy is now being complemented by a cash economy and this, combined with globalization and romantic television programs, is driving more youngsters to yearn for a monogamous marriage.

***Mi-nyag*** (Ch. *Dangxiang Qiang* or *Muya*)
As described by Stein, those whom the Chinese used to refer as Dangxiang Qiang have known themselves as Mi-nyag for more than fifteen hundred years.[78] Over time, the Mi-nyag created many kingdoms, the most recent being the Cha-la realm (Ch. *Mingzheng*); it lasted until the early twentieth century and encompassed most of today's western Sichuan. The most famous, though, was the Xixia kingdom (Eng. *Tangut Empire*, from Mongolian) located around today's Ninxia. The Xixia kingdom (1038-1227 CE) was founded with members of the Tuyuhun tribe, both groups having fled the Tibetan conquest.[79]

The Mi-nyag languages are close to Ergong, which is spoken mainly in Daofu, and have many similarities with the Zhaba language; they all belong to the Qiangic language group.[80] The ancient Mi-nyag towers are also very similar to those of Zhaba. In 2018, with assistance from Mi-nyag Choekyi Gyaltsan, I interviewed three elders in their seventies living in three different high altitude remote villages (SW, L and KZ[81]). Each of them recalled that 'in the past, people did not much care about getting married, children always belonged to the mother's family.'

***rGyal-rong Region*** (Ch. Jiarong)
The Jiarong region is recorded in Tibetan texts as the *Eighteen Kingdoms of rGyal-rong*, an attestation to its diversity.[82] Not only language (at least four of which belong to the Qiangic language group and are mutually unintelligible[83]), but customs are somewhat different in each valley.

As suggested by Van Driem, the Tibetan word *rGyal-rong* may be a diminutive for *Sar rGyal-mo Tsa-ba Ron* or the 'The hot valleys of the Eastern Queen'.[84] The name could stem from a queen of the

77 Mathieu, 17.
78 Stein, 1951, 227-8.
79 Van Driem, 449.
80 Personal communications with linguist Sun Hongkai in 2010 and reincarnated Buddha Mi-nyag Choekyi Gyaltsan in 2008, who is also the Tulku of a monastery in Zhaba; Sun Hongkai, *Languages of China* (中国的语言)(Beijing: Shangwu Publishers, 2007), 836. The Tuyuhun, known as *A-za* or *Ha-sa* in Tibetan, were a steppe people of Xianbei origins who had a very large kingdom starting in the third century of the Common Era. They were defeated by the Tibetans in 663 CE (Thomas, 28) but some of them later went on to establish, with the Mi-nyag, the Xixia Kingdom (Van Driem, 449-52).
81 Names abbreviated for anonymity.
82 For a list of these kingdom, see Frederick William Thomas, *Nam, An Ancient Language of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p 83.
83 Sun, 2007, 836.
84 Van Driem, 447.

ancient Dong Nüguo, although local legends link this queen with the native Bon goddess of Mount Muerdo (Tib. *dMu-rDo*), a splendid mountain towering at 4820 meters over Danba. The mountain has both a large womb-like cave and a prominent phallus-like stone, rendering it somewhat hermaphroditic. Even if some now refer to Muerdo as a male mountain[85], women continue to address their traditional prayers for fertility to Queen/Goddess Muerdo.[86]

Many reasons are given for the towers liberally scattered around the area; one of the more noteworthy is that parents needed to build a tower at the birth of a son because a man without a tower would not be able to find a wife.[87] The most famous tower has thirteen corners and stands in Pujiaoding. Local legend offers that its complicated plan was drawn on the ground by a woman using a ball of yarn and that the local prince married her.[88]

Situated on a wide plateau, Zhonglu is one of the richest villages of the Jiarong region. Locals speak the Khamba Tibetan language, which is similar to that of Pujiaoding. In the region, Zhonglu is commonly known as the village where women have the highest status because parents always leave the house to the firstborn, whether male or female. In the other villages the house is traditionally inherited by the firstborn boy. Zhe Li, a former county leader and Zhonglu inhabitant, related the following: when he was young, youngsters could flirt but never make love before marriage, and it was the girl who decided who she was to marry. In the evening, people would sit around the tripod to sing and tell stories. A boy who thought a girl would fancy him would come to sing to her, his head hidden under a shirt, so nobody but the girl knew who he was. If he succeeded in charming her, he could chat with her then sleep by her side, but if he tried to touch her, he would immediately be ridiculed by the girl and the other youngsters sleeping around the fire.

In Badi there is a village in the valley as well as three villages on the mountain. In these three mountain villages, there existed - until two decades ago - a custom of 'climbing the wall,' which today's folks explain according to different stories. YZ, one of the last climbers, told me rather sternly in the presence of his wife, that boys would only climb the outside wall to enter by the window of their beloved if their respective parents did not agree to let them marry. This is how he and his wife came to be married. Whereas one of the oldest women in the village related that her parents wanted her to marry a much older man, so she allowed her sweetheart to enter her room by the window before asking the local Tusi to intervene in their favor. The old lady was smiling mischievously as she summoned up her memories; maybe there was more to the story than what I was told. KZ, one of the oldest men in the village and now a widower, remembered wall climbing as a fun time for all the youngsters, boys and girls. He asserted that "If children resulted from these encounters, no problem, baby girls would belong to the woman's house and baby boys to the man's house." It appears that children were always welcome, independent of their sex.

Although there is no way to know the exact frontiers of the Eastern Queendom, the historical records make it clear that its boundaries endured until 742 CE and probably encompassed the lands of today's Jiarong, some of today's Qiang Zu, and territories to the north and west of these

85 G.yung 'brug and Rinchen rdo rje, 'A Powerful Hero and a Mountain Deity', *Asian Highlands Perspectives*, vol 10 (2011) pp. 73-98, available at http://www.plateauculture.org/writing/dmu-rdo-powerful-hero-and-mountain-deity [Accessed 05/03/2013].
86 Personal observation.
87 Darragon 2003.
88 Personal communication from my good friend Abu, a retired village chief living near this tower, 2001.

(see Map 2). Unfortunately, although I have carbon-dated eighty-two towers, none of the towers still standing in Sichuan are older than a millennium.[89]

## THE NÜGUO(S), MATRIARCHY, AND ANCIENT TOWERS

At the beginning of my research, I was quite surprised by mentions of two contemporaneous queendoms in the Chinese archives. At times, the records provide local names and precise locations but, unfortunately, perhaps on account of their unusual and similar mores, the Chinese scribes sometimes referred to either queendom as *Nüguo* instead of using the local names of each queendom. This led to some confusion between them, both in the ancient chronicles[90] and in the works of modern western researchers. However, despite a lack of clarity in some entries, the records provide very precise information in the many accounts describing the seventeen queendoms' delegations who pledged allegiance, from 586 to 742 CE, to the Chinese Emperors.[91]

### *General references in ancient Chinese texts*

This investigation into the historical existence of the queendoms was conducted in 2014 and 2015 by two Unicorn Foundation employees under my supervision, Cai Hui and Sun Ji (who holds a Master's degree in Classical Chinese).[92] Cai Hui and Sun Ji examined digitized versions of the historical texts. They found some discrepancies between the various electronic versions of the texts, due to differences between ancient originals and ancient copies and to transliteration from Middle Chinese into Classical or Simplified Chinese. Most of the documents consulted belong to the *Standard Histories*, a group of twenty-four works with a total of forty million words, composed of one *History* for each legitimate Chinese Dynasty.[93]

*Image 8: This copy of the* Book of Han *(compiled in 111 CE) was printed during the Ming dynasty and is held in the Tian Yi Chamber Library collection. © Gisling, CC 3.0 (Wikimedia Commons)*

In each *History*, the first volumes are the *Annals*, which relate facts about the emperor and foreign interactions; the second group of volumes are *Treatises*, depicting the national administrative system, rites, calendar, geography, and so forth. The third group, called *Biographies*, describes the imperial family, other notable personages, and the countries and peoples surrounding the empire.

89 In fact, the oldest ones still standing are in Nyangpo (TAR). Darragon, 2015 (8), 42 and fig. 24.
90 As we will see, this problem was noted as early as 1307 in the government publication called *Wenxian Tongkao*, which specifically addressed this issue in its chapter about the Nüguo(s) in Vol. 339, Part 16. Available at http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0401/01wxtk/342.htm
91 A correction was made to this sentence on 25 March 2022; formerly, the dates read '... from 856 to 742 AD...'
92 See note 52, page 128 about the Unicorn Foundation.
93 Endymion P. Wilkinson, *Chinese history: A Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 501.

To write this paper I have, with the help of my Chinese boyfriend Sun Wen,[94] reviewed and verified previous findings, mostly found among the *Biographies*.
I have also relied on the work of Bielenstein concerning the trade missions relevant to this paper.[95] In 2005, renowned Swedish sinologist Hans Bielenstein published an inventory of all the important missions recorded in the *Imperial Annals* form 589 to 1276 CE. In his own words, Bielenstein dealt chiefly with the exchange of missions and the goods they brought, and his study was purposely limited to foreign countries and peoples which were clearly listed under their own chapters in the dynastic histories and encyclopedias.[96] In addition to the missions given in Bielenstein's records, Sun Wen and I found two historical mentions of the Nüguo associated with earlier dates: in the *Book of Song*, it is written that in 445 CE, Muliyan, king of the Tuhuyun, gifted gold wine vessels from the Nüguo to the Chinese King[97] and the *Book of Sui* states that, in 586 CE, envoys from the Nüguo offered gifts then shut off communications.[98]

In conclusion, from 586 to 742 CE, seventeen distinct missions from the queendoms were received at the Chinese court: in 586, from 590 to 600, from 605 to 617, from 618 to 626, from 625 to 626, from 627 to 649, and in 630, 633, 634, 643, 656, 686, 689, 692, 696, 741 and 742. The Imperial records provide the names of six queens as well as those of many envoys. Four queens made the journey to China; the emperors bestowed titles upon them or members of their retinue. Note that the dates of each mission might show some discrepancies in modern texts; this is due to differences between the Gregorian calendar and the ancient Chinese lunar calendar, as well as the Chinese custom of dating years not in calendar years, but in reference to each emperor's reign. Regardless, the historical reality of the missions and, therefore, the states of origin, is indisputable.

As Bielenstein says,

> The chief sources for the current work are the dynastic histories. They were for this time compiled by committees, each presided over by a well-known scholar. [...] These histories give information about foreign states and tribes, their rulers, and their relations to China and each other. The Imperial Annals have brief, well-dated accounts. Chapters devoted to foreign countries or peoples [Treatises] are poorer in dates but richer in information. Important tribes are given chapters of their own, lesser ones are lumped together.[99]

As well, Bielenstein adds that there are other governmental publications of interest: the *Collected Matters of Importance* (Ch. *Huiyao*) and the *Comprehensive Encyclopedia Dealing with Government Matters* (Ch. *Tong Dian*).[100] He goes on to note that the Chinese had an insatiable appetite for knowledge of the customs of foreign peoples, their geographical settings, the names of their rulers, and current events.[101] In his comprehensive list, as it is in the *Annals*, there is one heading each for Dong Nüguo (which he translated as Eastern Women Kingdom) and Nüguo

94 Without whom I could never have done this research and who has all of my gratitude.
95 Hans Bielenstein, *Diplomacy and Trade in the Chinese World from 589 to 1276*, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 4 (Boston & Leiden: Brill, 2005).
96 Ibid, 2-5.
97 *Book of Song*, Vol. 96, Bio. 56. Available at http://chinesenotes.com/songshu/songshu096.html.
98 *Book of Sui*, Vol. 83, Bio. 48, section Nüguo. Available at http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/suisu/sui_083.htm
99 Bielenstein, 1.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid, 7.

(Women Kingdom); Tibet (Ch. *Tubo*), Supi, and Fuguo (Daofu today) are listed separately, each under their own headings. In light of the renown of the scholars compiling the *Standard Histories* and Bielenstein's skill, it is hard to believe that, even in patriarchal China, these queendoms would be imaginary constructs.

***'Nüguo': an ancient larger queendom split in two?***

The Chinese word *nüguo* may be translated into English as 'women/female-country' or 'women/female-state', or even 'women/female-kingdom' or simply 'queendom'. The prefix *nü* means 'woman/female'. The word *guo* means 'country', 'state', 'realm', 'kingdom' and, as such, it is gender-less. The Chinese scribes of the Sui and Tang dynasties recorded two borderland countries: the *Poluoximobuluo* and the *Sufalanaqudaluo* (also given as *Subanajudaluo*) as *nü*-states, therein stressing the latter's gender organisation. They also used the noun 'Nüguo' interchangeably with the local names. The scribes describe the two nüguo(s) in identical terms.

Each queendom had two queens whose offices were reported as being only sometimes hereditary and who were attended by many mostly female servants. The status of women was uniformly higher than that of men, and the husband-consorts of the queens were not involved in politics because social customs limited men's activities to war and agriculture. Royal palaces were nine-story towers, while the homes of commoners were six stories tall.[102] Folks in both countries painted their faces. In both queendoms the calendar year started in the eleventh month of the traditional Chinese calendar.[103] The people in these realms collected gold and performed bird divination; they practiced double burial for important individuals, and during the second burial, the bones were secured in iron gourds which were then buried.[104]

The similarity of these customs and the location of both queendoms 'south of Yutian'[105] led Pelliot to presume that they were, in reality, one single country which had split in two following the Tibetan expansion (see page 142). If there ever was a much larger queendom, though, historical mentions in Chinese Annals started after its demise. Although the Chinese scribes knew the local name (*Poluoximobuluo*) of the queendom located west of Tibet (and south of the Pamir Mountains), as well as that of the queendom east of Tibet (*Sufalanaqudaluo* or *Subanajudaluo*), they often did not mention these local names but refer to both of the queendoms as Nüguo(s). During the time when both queendoms were sending missions, the scribes referred to the eastern queendom as 'Dong Nüguo'. But I believe that, in the latest entries when only the eastern

102 Today there are no tall towers in the Kinnaur and southern Ladakh region, presumed location of the western queendom (Bettina Zeisler, 'East of the Moon and West of the Sun? Approaches to a Land with Many Names, North of Ancient India and South of Khotan' in The Tibet Journal, Vol. 34/35, No. 3/2, Special Issue: The Earth Ox Papers (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Autumn 2009-Summer 2010), 407-415). However, there are many ruins which may have been towers (personal observation) and many monasteries have very numerous floors, attesting to sophistication in local knowledge of stone building.

103 That would correspond to today's month of December and would imply that the queendoms celebrated the beginning of the year at the winter solstice – which is when the Jiarong people of Danba County celebrate their New Year today.

104 Zeisler has noted a similar custom in Ladakh and Swat. Zeisler, 413-14.

105 The ancient city of Yutian corresponds to today's city of Hetian (Tib.: Khotan) in Xingjiang. However, at the time of the scribes' writing, 'Yutian' would also refer to a region: the very large, cosmopolitan, Buddhist Yutian kingdom, which, during the first millennium CE, encompassed the southwestern Tarim Basin. Most of the jade used in China came from the kingdom of Yutian, which was intermittently a Chinese protectorate. The Tuyuhun and then the Tibetans also invaded parts of the Yutian kingdom.

queendom was sending missions to the Chinese court, the scribes did sometimes refer to that east-of-Tibet queendom as only 'Nüguo'.

It is worth noting that the Geba people, as mentioned above, still have similar rituals - although they use clay rather than iron vessels. Wellens explains that the Premi from Bustling township cremate their dead in an elaborate ritual; the ashes and some bones are then gathered and put in an urn which is carried up to the mountain cave belonging to the clan.[106]

***Details specific to entries entitled Nüguo (if and when specified as being south of the Pamirs)***
This matriarchal polity, known locally as *Poluoximobuluo*,[107] had an estimated ten thousand families and was located south of the Pamir Mountain range[108] and south of Yutian. It is recorded that its queen Su Pi held her crown for some twenty years; since she is also referred to as Mojie, *Su Pi* may indicate that she came from the Supi tribe (Tib. *Sum-pa*[109]), whose large territory, according to Stein, was conquered by the Tibetans in the late seventh century.[110] The queen's husband(s) were referred to as 'gold gatherer(s)'. The Chinese chronicles note that the people in *Poluoximobuluo* wore shoes made of animal skins, that the weather was cold, and that hunting was important. The country was considered to be a producer of precious stones, musk, yak, horses and salt. People worshiped Asura gods and tree gods (俗事啊修罗神，又有树神) and their New Year rituals involved sacrifices of men or monkeys (岁初以人祭，或用猕猴). If humans were not available for sacrifice, *mi* monkeys were used instead – the same type of monkey from which the Sanmiao claimed descent.[111] This queendom made a good profit selling salt to Tianzhu (ancient India)[112] but was often at war with that very same country and the Dangxiang Qiang.

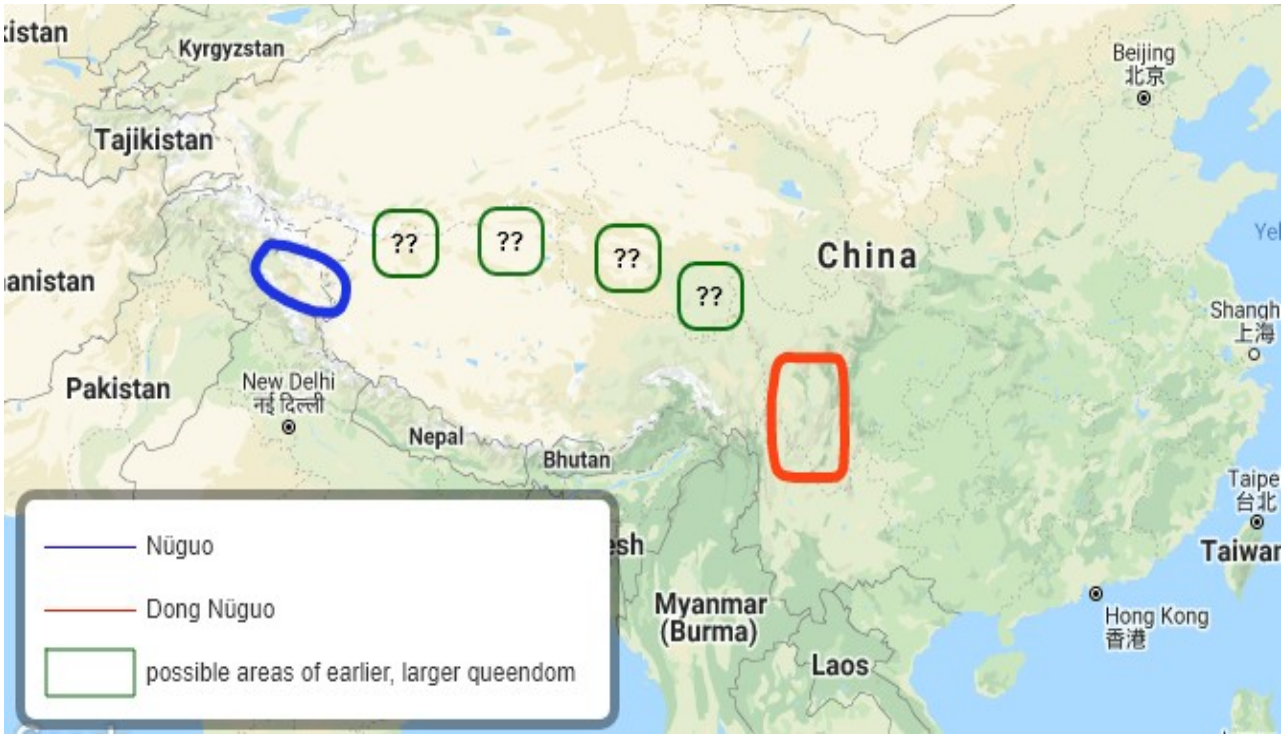
***Details specific to entries entitled Dong Nüguo in the Chinese historical records***
When the historical documents deal with the Dong Nüguo, there is no confusion: all entries entitled Dong Nüguo concern a queendom known as *Sufalanaqudaluo* or *Subanajudaluo*, located east of Tibet. The realm's inhabitants are identified in the chronicles of the time as Western Qiang and descriptions of the area refer to eighty towns, forty thousand families, and ten thousand soldiers.

The territory of this country lies within or near today's western Sichuan (see Map 2). More specifically, the records locate it west of Dangxiang Qiang (Mi-nyag)[113] and Maozhou (today's Maoxian), northwest of Yazhou (today's Ya'an), not far from Bailang Yi (South Central Tibet)[114] and south of Yutian (see note 104). In the *Old Book of Tang*, the country of *Sufalanaqudaluo /*

106 Wellens, 108.
107 This is the Chinese phonetic transliteration of a local name.
108 And therefore more than 2000 kms west of Sichuan.
109 See also Mathieu, note 135, for further information about the Sum-pa.
110 Stein, 41. *Supi* and *Sumpa* are transliterations of the same local name. Stein also mentions that the Supi tribe were of Qiang origins. Stein, 42.
111 *Book of Sui*, Vol. 83, Bio. 48, section Nüguo Available at:
http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/suisu/sui_083.htm
112 Until recently, people of the Indian side of the Himalayas imported salt from Tibet (personal observation 1998).
113 Historically the Mi-nyag roamed the watershed of the Yalong River, which originates south of the Upper Yellow River and flows into northwest Sichuan; these lands often overlapped with those of the Tuyuhun (Book of Sui, Vol. 83, Bio. 48). Xixia (the state of Tangut) did not yet exist.

*Subanajudaluo* is described as being 'wide from east to west but narrow from north to south'. However, confusingly, in the *New Book of Tang*, it is written that 'one needs nine days to travel from east to west and twenty days from north to south'.[115] The queens lived at a place where the river flowed north to south; the weather is reported as cold, and barley was cultivated.

Four queens of *Sufalanaqudaluo / Subanajudaluo* were received at the Emperor's court: Tang Pang from 618 to 626, Lian Bi in 686, E Yan'er in 692,[116] and Zhao Yefu in 742 CE. As we will see, interactions between successive emperors and successive queens are detailed at length; even if China was a patriarchal society at that time, these events were absolutely real. Significantly, also, the records emphasize on three occasions that, at some unknown point after 742, the queens of *Sufalanaqudaluo / Subanajudaluo* were replaced by kings. The latter make clear that the Chinese scribes were very well aware of a change in social organization when, in 793, King Tang Lixi came alone to the Chinese court; the same king returned to China from 796 to 797 CE in the company of monarchs from other minor kingdoms that the Tibetan Empire had overrun. Titles were bestowed on these kings but the records make no mention of the Chinese emperor meeting with any of them. After 797 CE, the queendoms are never mentioned again as independent or vassal states. The Tang dynasty continued for another hundred years; had the queendoms been patriarchal ideological constructs, why would the Tang scribes have suddenly stopped reporting on them?




*Map 2: Likely location of the Nüguo and the Dong Nüguo; interrogation marks represent the location of a possible earlier, larger queendom. Map based on Zeisler 2009/2010, 415. © Rowlatt 2021*

114 The Bailang Yi are a different people from today's Yi nationality; as specified in the *Histories of the Northern Dynasties*, the Bailang (Eng: *white wolves*) were Qiang, also descending from *mi* monkeys (vol. 96, bio 84, available at http://chinesenotes.com/beishi/beishi096.html).
115 This is not necessarily incompatible since the corridor was a region of constant feuding and frontiers might have varied greatly between different reports. As suggested by Zeisler (p. 418), the country may have been at times somewhat slanted instead of being on a north-south or west-east axis.
116 Mathieu remarks that the names of some Mosuo ancestors also include the same sinogram for '*E*', 408-9.

***Primary Source Material Regarding Matriarchal Customs***

The matriarchal character of the queendoms is impossible to dispute: until 742 CE, all the entries in the Chinese chronicles regularly note that they are always ruled by a queen, that women are held in high esteem, and that men have lower status. For example, from the section on the Nüguo in Volume 83, Biographies 48 of the *Book of Sui*, the scholars write: 'In this country, the kings are always women' (其国代以女为王), 'The queen husband(s) know nothing about politics. Local husbands only go to war' (女王之夫, 不知政事。国内丈夫唯以征伐为务), and 'It is customary for the women to be valued and the husbands despised, nobody is jealous' (其俗贵妇人，轻丈夫，而性不妒忌). From the section on the Nüguo in the chapter on Frontier Defense 9 of the *Tong Dian*: 'In this place there are five men for three women, the women are esteemed, the men are despised, the women can be officials, the men go to war' (其地五男三女, 贵女子, 轻丈夫, 妇女为吏职, 男子为军士) and 'The noble women can have many male servants, the men cannot have female servants' (女子贵则多有侍男, 男子不得有侍女), and 'Even ordinary women are the masters in their houses and each can have many husbands' (虽贱庶人之女, 尽为家长，有数夫焉).[117]

While the quotations I have cited in translation originate in the *Book of Sui* and the *Tong Dian*, each and every part of the Annals dealing with the western regions relates the same facts about the queendoms while often adding different details (see Appendix A for an annotated list of the primary sources). For example the *Tong Dian* also specifies, in the section about the Nüguo, that each woman has several husbands and children use their mother's name.[118]

In volume 3, the *Old Book of Tang* records that in 634 CE, envoys from the Nüguo together with envoys from Tubo (吐蕃, Eng. *Tibet*), Guizi (龟兹, Eng. *Kucha*), Gaochang (高昌, an ancient place near today's Turfan) and Shi (石, Eng. *Tashkent*) kingdoms came to the Chinese court and offered gifts.[119] In volume 197, it is written that between 618 and 626, Queen Tang Pang (her name in Chinese) of Dong Nüguo sent envoys with gifts to the court and the first Emperor of the Dynasty, Tang Gaozu, gifted the envoys with valuables. As they were returning to their country, they were captured by Turks; Jie Liping (possibly a Mongol) freed them and escorted them back to the Tang court. The Emperor then gave the Dong Nüguo's envoys a pass with his seal so they would not be bothered again. In 686 CE, another queen, Lian Bi, came to the court and was given a high honorific title. And in 742, Queen Zhao Yefu was bestowed with two high honorific titles (including that of *Guichang king*) during a banquet that the Emperor Tang Zuanzong held for her in Qujiang (near today's Xi'an).[120]

The *Institutional History of Tang* has a chapter for each queendom. In the Dong Nüguo section, it is written that the last queen of the Eastern Queendom was called Bin Jiu and one of her officials Gao Ba, and that after her reign, the Eastern queendom becomes a kingdom.[121]

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117 All translations here by Sun Wen and author.

118 *Comprehensive Encyclopedia Dealing with Government Matters (Tong Dian),* Vol. 193, Chapter Frontier Defense, section Nüguo. Available at https://ctext.org/tongdian/193/zhs

119 *Old Book of Tang,* Vol. 3, 2nd section, Tai Zong. Available at https://zh.m.wikisource.org/zh/舊唐書/卷 3. I believe that this might have been one of the last missions from the western Queendom (south of the Pamirs), which was likely invaded by Tibet one or two decades later. Most of the next missions probably came from the Eastern Queendom, whether labelled as *Dong Nüguo* or *Nüguo*. At the time, this eastern part may have been all that remained of the larger original queendom. However, this is a matter for another paper.

120 *Old Book of Tang,* Vol. 197, Bio. 147, Section Dong Nüguo.

121 *Institutional History of Tang,* Vol. 99, sections Nüguo and Dong Nüguo, Available at http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0401/01thy/101.htm.

In the *Cefu Yuangui*, volume 970, a chapter entitled 'Ministers from Other Kingdoms Pay Tributes' part 3, lists the tributes paid by the queendoms and also records precisely the names of some of their envoys.[122]

Most important of all, part 16 of the *Comprehensive Studies in Literary and Documentary Sources* (*Wenxian Tongkao*), written in 1307 CE, has two sections with the titles 'Eastern Women' and 'Western Women'. The scribes here attempt to clarify the confusion between the two queendoms, one located to the east of Tibet and one to the west of Tibet, south of the Pamirs. The texts insist that the western and the eastern queendoms have identical customs.[123] They state that many past records did not want to use the term 'western queendom' because earlier scribes were aware of ancient legends in early books about unreliable accounts of 'fantastic women's countries' located in the western seas.[124]

## OTHER TEXTUAL ANALYSES

### *Analyses of Texts by Modern Chinese Scholars*

Most Chinese scholars who do not speak fluent English or who have not lived in the West do not doubt the historical reality of these ancient queendoms. Historian Ren Xinjian, archaeologist Wang Lumao, ethnologists Li Xingxing, Jiang Jiaming, and Shi Shuo, among others, have conducted research upon different aspects of the Nüguo(s) without feeling a need to further prove their matriarchal character, which they take for granted. Jennifer Jay, a Chinese scholar who lives in Canada, lightly hinted at the matriarchal nature of the Dong Nüguo in a 1996 article.[125] Her reticence may have been due to a desire to avoid rocking the boat or exposing herself to academic ridicule; connections claimed by communism with matriarchy remain suspicious. Also, her specialty is Chinese civilization and the Nüguo(s) were not part of China.

### *Mentions and Analyses of Texts by Western Scholars*

Many Western travelers and illustrious scholars have attempted to decipher available information about the Nüguo(s). Only the most relevant will be mentioned here since each of them has, in part, relied on information provided by the others. It should be noted that, were it not for their obvious reference to matriarchal states, there would not be any reluctance by Western scholars to accept the historical reality of the queendoms. The existence of all the other countries with precisely recorded missions are not contested, even if some of these countries have long disappeared and cannot be precisely located or if names, frontiers, and ethnicity have changed over time.

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122 *Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau* (*Cefu Yuangui)*, Vol. 970, chapter entitled Ministers from Other Kingdoms Pay Tributes, part 3. Available at http://www.guoxue123.com/zhibu/0201/03cfyg/0970.htm

123 *Comprehensive Studies in Literary and Documentary Sources (Wenxian Tongkao)*, Vol. 339, Chapter Considerations about Remote Regions, Part 16. Available at http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0401/01wxtk/342.htm.

124 Some of these countries turn out to be roughly in the location of today's matrilineal Minangkabau and Maliku peoples, even if other details were in fact fantastic.

125 Jennifer Jay, 'Imagining Matriarchy: "Kingdoms of Women" in Tang China', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 116, No. 2, (Apr - Jun 1996), 220-9.

William Woodville Rockhill, an American diplomat fluent in Tibetan, Sanskrit and Chinese, was one of the first lay Westerners to explore the classical polyandry region in any depth and, more specifically, the Sino-Tibetan Marches. He noticed the high status, free sexual attitude, and rather tall and strong physiques of the women of the Marches.[126] He dedicated a few pages of his monograph *The Land of the Lamas* to the Nüguo(s), which he had researched in a few difficult-to-access ancient Chinese books. The passages he translated describe *de facto* matriarchal societies, but Rockhill makes no further comment.

In his posthumous work *Notes sur Marco Polo*, polyglot and renowned scholar Paul Pelliot dedicated thirty pages to the two 'Kingdoms of Women' east and west of Tibet, along with seventeen pages to the 'evidently mythological' islands of women of the western seas portrayed in some very ancient Chinese texts. After analyzing Chinese, Indian, and Tibetan texts, as well as comments by Westerners, he concludes that the inhabitants were probably Supi (Tib. *Sum-pa)*, and that the original queendom could have been a large country that was spilt into several parts at an early stage of the Tibetan advance (see Map 2).[127] In her monograph, Christine Mathieu notes that, today, Sum-pa designates aristocracy among both Mosuo and Naxi people; this, along with the presence of the sinogram 饿 or 俄 for '*E'* (also *Ngue*[128]) in the names of Mosuo ancestors mentioned earlier, convinced her that the Mosuo people are descendants of the Dong Nüguo.[129]

Professor Bettina Zeisler of Tubingen University is a linguist specializing in historical and comparative linguistics and philology of Tibet, as well as the early history of the Tibetan regions. Working from ancient texts written in Tibetan, Indian, Greek, Korean, and Arabic, as well as Chinese translations and more recent English and German sources, she attempted, in a 2010 article, to define the exact locations of the two Nüguo(s), among other ancient lands.[130] In this article, I have relied completely on her research to locate the western queendom, as I have only visited these western regions once. Zeisler generally agrees with Pelliot's view on the possibility that an ancient and much larger country was split into smaller parts by invaders and laments that western scholars have refused to even consider the existence of the queendoms. Because the 445 CE record mentions 'gold wine vases from the Nüguo' by the king of Tuhuyun (refer to p. 136) and because wine is traditionally made in lower Ladakh and in Kinnaur, she writes 'if there had been only a single Nüguo, and I were forced to decide which one was the real one, I would opt for the western one'.[131]

Indeed, the primary written references overwhelmingly validate the existence of at least one real matriarchy and very likely two until 742 CE. No archeological remains have yet been found in Sichuan, since it is likely that iron urns would have disintegrated after 1300 years in the rather humid soil of the Sino-Tibetan Marches. However, as this paper was being edited for publication, rumour has arrived of an early-1900s photo taken in Ladakh, India, of ceramic vessels full of bones reputed to date from the time of the Nüguo.[132] Even if no material remains dated to the Dong Nüguo are discovered, the photograph may point towards remains of the western Nüguo.

126 Rockhill, 229-30.
127 Paul Pelliot, *Notes sur Marco Polo,* 3 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963), Vol. 2, 718.
128 Mathieu gives *Ngue* for this character, in line with the Wade-Giles transcription used by pre-1948 scholars, including Joseph Rock.
129 Mathieu, 409.
130 See Note 101 for full citation. Many countries which existed at the time have long disappeared and are impossible to locate today. As per example '*Sanbohe*'.
131 Ibid, 413.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has established that the Sino-Tibetan Marches are a region of the world where matrilineal marriage-less communities are found alongside a diversity of family systems. Their existence compels us to realize that families have to be understood as part of cultural systems and not as variations of the nuclear family based on a marital couple. This study also attests that matrilineal families are in fact very stable over generations; it is only the marital relationship which may be unstable because fathers are often regarded as transitory males.[133]

In 2012, Laura Fortunato clearly stated that 'humans show a remarkable degree of variation in social organization across groups'.[134] Cultural acceptance of variations such as polygyny (if sororal and/or matrilocal), polyandry, partible paternity, group marriage, serial monogamy, and traditional cases of same-sex pairing or night-visits, indicates the prioritization of family (as understood by Reiss) without female monogamy or the subordination of women. When all children are valued, there is little incentive for controlling women's sexuality, and the woman – more often than not – decides with whom she will be sexually active, as found in many cultures of the Sino-Tibetan Marches and elsewhere.

As DNA analysis now enables the accurate sexing of skeletons, along with the identification of their precise kinship relations, I posit that new archeological findings will continue to confirm that marriage-less families have been historically common in a variety of areas and settings. A case in point is the Neolithic Dawenkou Culture at the Fujia site in Shandong, China, which 'conforms to the pattern expected for a matrilineal population without in-married males.'[135] Even if archeological remains of the Marches' matriarchies remain undiscovered, queendoms in other parts of the world are being unearthed, such as a matrilineal dynasty which existed from 800 to 1130 CE in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, USA.[136] Future research may indicate if this dynasty is evoked in the Pueblo oral tradition of today's Hopi and Zuni peoples.

This paper has also established as historical fact the existence of a matriarchy until approx. 1300 years ago, located in the classical polyandry area of the Sino-Tibetan Marches. The evidence is newly available due to the recent digitalization of Chinese primary sources, which makes accessible originals which are difficult to access, fragile, very hard to read, and overwhelming in their abundance. The historical reality of the (western) Nüguo and the Dong Nüguo has profound implications for the fields of ethnology and anthropology, as well as the worldview of many patriarchal cultural systems, where there is a determination to prevent leadership by women. The

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132 August Hermann Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, Vol 1 (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co, 1914), 64-5 and pl. XXVIIIa. I am grateful to John Bellezza for calling this to my attention

133 The realization that males can be disposable obviously triggers anxiety in patriarchal-societies-raised-males, this possibly explains why, until recently, white male scholars have repeatedly labelled as a temporary aberration unworthy of consideration, each and every example of community that did not conform to the nuclear family pattern.

134 Laura Fortunato, 'The evolution of matrilineal kinship organization,' in *Proceedings of the Royal Society Biological Sciences*, Vol. 279, no. 1749, (Oct 2012), 4939.

135 Yu Dong *et al,* 'Low Mitochondrial DNA Diversity in an Ancient Population from China: Insight', *Human Biology Open Access Pre-Prints*. Paper 73 (2015), 72, available at https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/humbiol_preprints/73 (accessed 10/08/2016).

136 Douglas J. Kennett *et al*, 'Archaeogenomic evidence reveals prehistoric matrilineal dynasty', *Nature Communications* 8 (2017), available at https://www.nature.com/articles/ncomms14115/email/correspondent/c3/ (accessed 12/01/2021).

immediate and practical consequences of women's leadership, where permitted today, can be seen in a study from June 2020 demonstrating that female-led countries have handled the coronavirus pandemic 'systematically and significantly better' than those run by men, even after controlling for GDP per capita, population, and the size of urban and elderly populations.[137]

It is a fact that the most powerful empires of history were patriarchal and most conquests were led by men. However, my research indicates that a few women did have meaningful roles as queens and/or warriors, and that they were, generally, as ruthless as men. Descriptions of the Nüguo(s) as often at war with their neighbors or practicing human sacrifice show the queendoms as similar to other societies of the time, not more or less peaceful because of the sex of the leaders. Any reduction of women to idealized qualities of current, Western-style mothering do not reflect historical reality. As Talalay explains, "If women's reproductive capabilities are the source of their power, then women remain, to some extent, locked within an unchanging domestic sphere… being static, women's roles can never account for developments in cultural systems."[138]

Given the astounding diversity of social arrangements for procreation, there is no grand theory which can serve to justify or invalidate any specific social organization of our past. It is worth speculating about the spread of the institution of marriage as an early tool for establishing territorial control and social dominance over a hierarchically-ordered community, but that is for another article. Moreover, with evidence for the existence of matriarchal queendoms from at least 445 to 742 CE, there is no excuse for dismissing matriarchies as a myth by academics or the general public. Such an attempt can only indicate, as Victor Mair writes, a struggle to come to terms with those who are different from us.[139]

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Frederique Darragon** considers herself a Citizen of the Planet. She holds an MA in Economy, is a self-taught oil painter, a polo player who kept two records for fifteen years, a photographer, a documentary filmmaker, and a philanthropist. She created the Unicorn Foundation and co-founded the Sichuan University Unicorn Heritage Institute to study, document, and protect the native cultures of southwest China and boost local minority peoples' self-esteem. Since the early 1990s, she has spent more than seven full years crisscrossing rural China and Tibet. In 1998 she started researching, mapping, and dating some little-known ancient star-shaped towers of the Sino-Tibetan Marches. To promote their protection she filmed a documentary broadcast by Discovery Channel, held photo exhibits, and published a book while working in close contact with the UNESCO and the Chinese government. The towers are now protected and most are inscribed on the World Heritage Tentative List. Following her research, she was awarded the title of Professor Honoris Causa by Sichuan University and, for a few years, was a guest professor at Sichuan University. She is currently writing a book about past and present Himalayan matricultures.

137 Bill Bostock, *Business Insider France*, 08/19/20, available at https://www.businessinsider.fr/us/coronavirus-women-leaders-handled-pandemic-better-than-men-study-2020-8 (accessed 09/11/2020).
138 Lauren Talalay, 'A Feminist Boomerang: The Great Goddess of Greek Prehistory', *Gender & History*, Vol.6, No.2 (Aug), 173.
139 Victor Mair, 'Review: *Myths of the Dog-Man* by David Gordon White', in *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (1991), 360-3.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Chinese historical sources pertaining to the Nüguo queendoms** (annotated)
Most of the primary sources listed below are Imperial archives or government publications; two are not. Most are available in digital format and I have indicated the URL when available. They are all in Chinese; some use traditional Chinese characters, others use simplified ones. Two are photographic reproductions of ancient texts.

1. *Book of Song* (*Song Shu*, 宋书), sixth of the *Standard Histories*, 100 volumes compiled in 492–493 by Shen Yue (479–502). It covers the Southern Song (or Liu Song) dynasty (420 to 479 CE). Many volumes are lost. In volume 96, Biography 56, the section entitled Xianbei-Tuyuhun, recalls, among other events, the gift of golden wine vessels from the Nüguo by the Tuyuhun King to the Chinese King Liu Yilong.
   Available at http://chinesenotes.com/songshu/songshu096.html

2. *Illustrated Book of the Western Regions* (*Xiyutuji*, 西域图记), 100 volumes finished in 606 by Pei Ju. The original is lost but its preface is quoted in the *Book of Sui* (ca 656) Volume 67, Biography 32. In the section entitled Pei Ju, there is a mention of Dong Nüguo located in the Western Regions (i.e. west of then-small China).
   The preface is available athttps://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-hans/西域圖記

3. *Buddhist Records of the Western Regions* (*Datangxiyuji*, 大唐西域记), a travel log of 12 volumes, published in 646 by the monk Xuan Zang and recording his 19 years of travel (626 to 645) through 110 countries. In Volume 4, the section entitled '15 Kingdoms' states that the Poluoximobuluo Country is also known as the Nüguo and is located in the Big Snow Mountains between Tubo (Tibet) to the east, the Yutian (Hetian) kingdom to the north, and the *Sanbohe* Kingdom to the west (unknown location). Note that since Chinese can only express *queen* with a compound word meaning 'woman-king', it is not surprising that a queendom would be listed among kingdoms.
   Available at http://guoxue.lishichunqiu.com/shibu/datangxiyuji/6195.html

4. *Sakyamuni Gazetteer* (*Shijiafangzhi*, 释迦方志), 2 volumes written by Dao Xuan ca. 650, a monk who tried to visit all the Buddhist counties. The book very clearly mentions both Nüguo queendoms, each with their local names and identical matriarchal customs. It stresses that the Poluoximobuluo sell salt to Indians, but are also often at war with them.
   Available at https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/释迦方志/卷上

5. *Book of Sui* (*Sui Shu*, 隨书), thirteenth of the *Standard Histories*, 85 volumes compiled in 636 but revised until 656 by Wei Zheng, Linghu Defen, and Zhangsun Wuji. It covers the Sui dynasty (581-618). In Volume 83, Biography 48, there is a section entitled Nüguo, which locates this country south of the Pamirs. Later, in a section entitled Fuguo, the description of Fu's location states that the Fu Kingdom is east of the Nüguo. The Fu Kingdom is today's Daofu County, in Sichuan, where Zhaba is located. So, either the western and the eastern queendoms are lumped together in one description, or this entry is describing, as Pelliot suggests, a very large country, possibly a confederation of tribes, stretching from Sichuan to India.
   Available at http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/suisu/sui_083.htm

6. *History of the Northern Dynasties* (*Beishi*, 北史), fifteenth of the *Standard Histories*, 100 volumes; published in 659 by Li Dashi and his son Li Yanshou. The volumes cover the period from 386 to 618, with the histories of Northern Wei, Western Wei, Eastern Wei, Northern Zhou, Northern Qi, and Sui dynasty. In volume 97, Biography 85, a section about the Western Region includes a sub-section entitled Nüguo, all of which concerns the western Queendom.
   Available at http://guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/beishi/beis_097.htm

7. *Comprehensive Encyclopedia Dealing with Government Matters* (*Tong Dian*, 通典), 200 volumes finished in 801 by Du You. It covers an array of topics from antiquity to 756 CE. In Volume 193, the chapter entitled Frontier Defense includes a section on the Nüguo at the time of the Sui dynasty.
   Available at https://ctext.org/tongdian/193/zhs

8. *Book of Tang* or *Old Book of Tang* (*Jiu Tang Shu*, 就唐书), sixteenth of the *Standard Histories*, 200 volumes published in 945 by Lui Xu. It covers the Tang dynasty (618 to 907 CE). In different section, it gives lengthy details, about both the (western) Nüguo and the Dong Nüguo.
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9. *Institutional History of Tang* (*Tang Huiyao*, 唐会要), 100 volumes, ca. 961 by Wang Pu. It covers the Tang dynasty. In volume 99, there is a separate section for each queendom.
   Available at http://www.guoxue123.com/shibu/0401/01thy/101.htm

10. *Universal Geography of the Reign of Great Tranquility* (*Taiping Huanyuji*, 太平寰宇记), 200 volumes published by Yue Shi in 987. This document was commissioned by the new emperor Song Taizong (939-997) of the Song Dynasty to help him rule his country after 60 years of disorder. This work acknowledges only briefly the (western) Nüguo, focusing more on neighboring tribes still in existence.
    Available at
    https://www.zhonghuadiancang.com/tianwendili/taipinghuanyuji/45758.html

11. *Prime Tortoise of the Record Bureau* or *Outstanding Models from the Record Bureau* (*Cefu Yuangui*, 册府元鬼), 1000 volumes by Wang Qinruo and associates, presented to the Emperor Zhenzong in 1013. The largest encyclopedia compiled during the Song dynasty, it

recounts all things related to the administration of the empire and the imperial family. It records detailed missions by both the Nüguo and later on by the Dong Nüguo
Available at http://www.guoxue123.com/zhibu/0201/03cfyg/0970.htm

12. *New Book of Tang* (*Xin Tang Shu*, 新唐书), the seventeenth of the *Standard Histories*, 75 volumes (plus 150 volumes of common biographies) published in 1060 by Song Qi, Ouyang Xiu, and associates. It was commissioned by the Emperor Song Renzong to verify and improve the previous *(Old) Book of Tang* and covers the Tang dynasty. In Volume 221, Biography 146, part 1 repeats much of the lengthy previous information mentioned in the Book of Tang after having verified its authenticity.
Available at http://chinesenotes.com/xintangshu/xintangshu221a.html

13. *Comprehensive Studies in Literary and Documentary Sources* (*Wenxian Tongkao*, 文献通考), Finished by Ma Duanlin in 1307. In volume 339, Considerations about Remote Regions, Part 16 has a section entitled *Eastern Women*, and another called *Western Women*. Many details about each queendom and their missions are given. As we saw, the text explains why both queendoms had sometimes been confused.
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# Political Transformations and Love Suicide Among the Naxi People[1]

YANG FUQUAN[2]

**Abstract**

*All people in the world are familiar with the tragedy of love suicide, but few societies have experienced love suicide on the scale suffered by the Naxi people of China. This paper argues that the reason the Naxi committed love suicide in dreadfully high numbers must be sought in socio-cultural changes brought about by political reforms and, in particular, in the large-scale transformation of Naxi culture that followed the integration of Lijiang into the Qing imperial administration in 1723. These reforms, implemented by appointed officials, shaped unsolvable contradictions between new rules of arranged marriages and the Naxi's own traditional views of sex and marriage. These contradictions resulted in a tragically high rate of suicide among Naxi youth and especially among young Naxi women, as well as a unique socio-cultural phenomenon. For the Naxi, love suicide became a social custom that fostered religious rituals and sacred texts about martyrdom, as well as tragic literary works romanticizing sacrifice and mystical beliefs. Love suicide was not only a grave social problem among the Naxi, it was also a peculiar cultural phenomenon involving a complex combination of social and cultural factors.*

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*Toutes les sociétés humaines connaissent la tragédie du suicide par amour, mais peu de peuples ont fait l'expérience du suicide dans des taux aussi élevés que le peuple Naxi de Chine. Le présent article argumente que la cause principale du suicide par amour chez les Naxi repose dans les changements socio-culturels créés par certaines réformes politiques, et en particulier la transformation à grande échelle de la culture naxi à la suite de l'intégration de Lijiang dans le système administratif impérial des Qing en 1723. Ces réformes, qui ont été implémentées par des fonctionnaires nommés par le gouvernement impérial, ont donné suite à des contradictions irréductibles entre de nouvelles règles relatives aux marriages arrangés et les perceptions traditionelles des*

1For a detailed study on the Naxi love suicide custom, refer to the book by Yang Fuquan: *Yulong qing shang: Naxizu de xunqing yanjiu*, 玉龙情殇：纳西族的殉情研究 [A Study Of Love Suicide among the Naxi People], Yunnan Renminchubanshe, Kunming, 2009.

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*Naxi sur la sexualité et le marriage. Ces contradictions ont abouti à un taux de suicide effroyable parmi les jeunes Naxi et surtout parmi les jeunes femmes, mais aussi à un phénomène socio-culturel unique. Pour les Naxi, le suicide par amour est devenu une coutume qui a stimulé des rites, des textes sacrés, et des oeuvres littéraires romançant le sacrifice des amants et les croyances mystiques. Le suicide par amour était non seulement un problème social gravissime, mais aussi un phénomène culturel inédit impliquant un complexe de facteurs sociaux et culturels.*

## *Reforming the Barbarians by Implementing Han Customs*: the reform of the native prefecture and love suicide among the Naxi People

The suicide of Naxi lovers was first recorded in the 1901 book *Continued General Annals of Yunnan in the period of Guangxu*, as follows:

> Unmarried men and women who love each other and had sexual relations cannot be married if their parents have promised them to others. When the lovers cannot tear themselves apart, they swear to die together. They put on new clothing, go into the mountain, sing to each other. Then they have a good meal and wine, and they commit suicide. They join hands, and tie their clothing together. They then jump off the mountain cliff and die together according to their wish.[3]

The consideration of a broad range of factors reveals that the principle cause of Naxi love suicide rests with the reforms of the local cultural and political system following the implementation of the policy known as *Returning the Land to the Flow* (改土归流, *gaituguilou*). In 1723, the first year of the Yongzheng Emperor, the native prefecture of Lijiang was abolished: the hereditary native chieftain and officials were removed and replaced by appointed imperial administrators. Indirect rule was over, and Lijiang was integrated into the Qing administration.

This administrative reform introduced deeply disruptive cultural reforms into Lijiang. Prior to the Qing dynasty, Lijiang had been relatively remote from the culture of the Chinese interior - which, in the remainder of this article, I identify as 'Han'.

From the Tang (618-907) through the Song dynasties (960-1279) and into the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), there was relatively little contact between Yunnan and the Chinese interior, and no opportunities for a cultural clash to develop between external laws and regulations and the native culture. In Volume 14 of the sixteenth-century *General Annals of Yunnan*, it is written that, during the three hundred years of the Song Dynasty, “Nanzhong was abandoned as a foreign land, and only a few words in the historic records survived. Han culture was cut off and no one could learn and follow Han customs.”[4] Lijiang was in fact isolated not only from the Chinese interior but from the outside world at that time, and in a state of peaceful development. It can be imagined that this stable social environment created good conditions for the development of the local culture. It is in this period time that the Naxi Dongba religion and other cultural modes developed. A social

3 *Xu Yunnan tong zhi*, 续云南通志 [*Continued General Annals of Yunnan in the period of Guangxu*], Yunnan shengzhì bianzuan weiyuanhui bangongshi bian, 1901.
4 Zou Yinglong and Li Yuanyang *Wanli Yunnan Tongzhì*, 14, 万历云南通志 [Records of Yunnan, Wanli period (1573-1620)]. Zhongguowenlianchubanshe, 2013. Note that Nanzhong is known today as Yunnan.

environment which is less disturbed by the outside world will promote the stable development of the traditional customs of a nation, and the society will not change greatly. Under such conditions, it is impossible to produce a large number of tragic martyrs.

Between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Yuan and Ming emperors instituted indirect rule over Yunnan and Sichuan by appointing native chieftains to govern the local people. Yuan and Ming policies, however, allowed ethnic people to follow their own customs. In *Yuan History*, it is written: “The common people and their barbarian native chieftains retain their ancient traditions and follow traditional customs of administration.”[5] Therefore, during the Yuan dynasty, as in the previous periods, no cultural conflict had opportunity to cause deep or widespread socio-cultural change and the Naxi people were able to maintain many ancient customs.

During the Ming period (1368-1644), native chieftains issuing from the Mu clan ruled over Lijiang and established a feudal system.[6] The Mu controlled a vast territory. With the support of the Ming emperors, they expanded their realm and prospered both economically and culturally, and their power reached its zenith at the close of the seventeenth century. The Mu chiefs were loyal vassals of the Chinese emperors and willingly embraced Confucianism: they adopted the Confucian etiquette and emulated the Han customs of the Chinese interior. However, the Mu and other aristocrats adopted Confucian mores and values only as an elite practice and an elite marker. Confucian modes were not widely implemented among the common people and feudalisation of Naxi society under the Mu chiefs proceeded without recourse to Confucianism. During the Ming Dynasty, the Mu clan maintained the policy of 'conforming to custom and etiquette without changing the old' and Confucian mores were not mandated among the population at large. In 1384, during the seventeenth year of his reign, Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu) emperor and founder of the Ming dynasty wrote:

I have appointed noble and virtuous men, offered rewards for their meritorious service, and reserved the right to demote them; all have a charter. Since the native chieftains do not change the old ways and are compliant with the customs of their people, they are able to keep the peace between them and to govern over them.[7]

Under this policy, the region of Lijiang experienced no significant social change.

Beginning with the reign of the Emperor Yongzheng (1722-1735), Qing officials carried out a large-scale policy of replacing the native chieftains with appointed officials among the people of southwestern China. The native prefectures were abolished and made way for a two-tiered administration at both the county and prefectural levels. Governors were also appointed by the emperor and sent into what are known today as the 'nationality minority regions'. This large-scale political reor-

5 Song Lian, *Yuanshi*, *Renzong benji*, 元史.仁宗本纪 [Yuan History. Book of Renzong]. Zhonghuashuju, 1976. This record was composed under the direction of Ming dynasty historian Song Lian in 1370, during the Ming period (1368-1646). Song Lian's dates are 1310–1381. Emperor Renzong was the fourth Emperor of the Song dynasty and reigned 1022-1063.

6 The Mu chiefs were descended from the Ah chieftains family, who had been instituted by the Yuan administration following the Mongol conquest of Yunnan in 1253. The Ah changed their names to Mu when the rule of the native chief Ah-De was confirmed by the Hongwu emperor (1368-1398) founder of the Ming dynasty.

7 *Yunnan Shiliao Congkan*, di 2, 云南史料丛刊, 第二十四集 [Yunnan Historical Materials Series, Vol. 24] Yunnan Daxue Lishi Yanjiusuo Youyìnben, 1978.

ganization brought profound changes in the social organizations and cultures of many the people of southwestern regions. Officials who had carried out the policy of *Controlling the Native People by Conforming to Local Customs* in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties now implemented the policy of *Reforming the Barbarians by Implementing Han Customs* (以夏变夷, *yi xia bian yi*). They turned to lamenting the past and criticizing the officials of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties whose policies of legal restraint had done little to 'civilize the barbarians'.[8]

Along with other frontier regions, Lijiang was incorporated into the political regime of the Chinese interior. In the wake of this administrative re-organisation, Confucian ethics and Han customs were imposed on Naxi customs. The Qing government initiated the naturalisation of Lijiang in 1723, in the first year of Yongzheng's reign. The Qing ranked ethnic minorities according to a scale of degrees of civilisation based on Manchu and Han cultural standards and Confucian ethics, and proceeded with a policy of 'Reforming the Barbarians through Han Customs' and the newly appointed magistrates in Lijiang proceeded with full implementation of the cultural reforms mandated by the Qing regime.

The first policy goal was to expand and universalize Confucian education among the Naxi. In 1697, Emperor Kangxi appointed Kong Xingxun, a sixty-sixth-generation descendant of Confucius as *Tong Pan* (advisory magistrate) to the Lijiang native chieftain. Kong Xingxun, upon discovering that not a single Confucian Temple could be found in Lijiang, wrote this:

> In 1697, at the beginning of my stay in Lijiang, when I compared the sight of the beautiful mountains and rivers to the primitive local customs, I could not help but sigh deeply. The way forward lies with the Confucian rites and music, but in order to have rites and music, a Confucian temple must first be constructed.[9]

Kong Xingxun's disenchantment was echoed by the Chinese officials who were appointed to Lijiang after him. All saw the customs of the various ethnic groups from the perspective of Confucianism and Qing culture. They regarded as 'lowly and barbarous' all those who ignored the rules of Confucian ethics and Confucian rites and music. In their eyes, the ancient Naxi Dongba culture, Buddhism (both Tibetan and Chinese) and even the Taoist culture, which had all been established in Lijiang and in other Naxi areas under the rule of the Mu native chieftains during the Ming dynasty, amounted to nothing more than barbaric customs. They believed that it was their sacred destiny to reform the customs and traditions of 'exotic places' by replacing them with Confucian rites and music and with Confucian social norms and moral principles.

After 1723, the appointed officials sent to Lijiang by the Imperial government tried very hard to instill new ethics among the people of Lijiang and to reform their customs according to Confucian norms. In 1743 Guan Xuexuan, who was appointed magistrate to Lijiang in 1736, compiled the *Lijiang prefectural records*, where he wrote:

> Lijiang is connected to the western regions; the people believe in Buddhism and ghosts, carry crossbows and wear swords. They followed the dress code of the barbarians but

8 *Qianlong Lijiang Fuzhi*, 乾隆. 丽江府志 [Qianlong, Lijiang Prefectural Records] *Lìjiāng zhì bàngōngshì*, 1991. These are records compiled by the magistrate Guan Xuexuan in 1743.
9 Ibid.

> now their headgear has been reformed. The duty of a senior official is to maintain Confucian principles. If the principles are installed, then integrity will be encouraged and the local customs will become serene and good; if the customs are serene and good according to Confucian principles, then the people's speech and behavior will also follow Confucian principles.[10]

In his preface, Guan Xuexuan assured posterity that he: "... is the keeper of this land and his office has received blessings from afar ... Ever since he has been appointed to govern this land, he has changed the local customs and carried out the Confucian principles. All the rules and regulations are followed according to the principles of the Chinese interior." Also in the eighteenth century, in the *Records of the Xueshan Academy*, then-Provincial Education Officer Cai Song praised Yang Bi, the first appointed magistrate of Lijiang, with this comment: "Gentleman Yang has made it his duty to educate and transform the customs of Lijiang."[11]

Such comments can be found everywhere in the Lijiang records of the Qing Dynasty. The policy adopted by the Qing government officials in the Naxi area had for objective to 'reform the Barbarians by implementing Han customs.' Therefore, officials who measured Naxi cultural modes according to Han and Manchu cultural values sought to reform the customs which they considered 'barbarous, lowly and vulgar' accordingly.

Along with expanding the Confucian schools, Qing government officials carried out a comprehensive reform of customs in Lijiang, mandating that funeral rites, weddings, marriage rules and dress standards conform to the Manchu and Han standards of the Chinese interior. The Naxi people had long practiced cremation but the Qing officials abhorred this custom, which they saw as barbaric and uncivilized. From their perspective, cremation denied the dead the customary offerings of Chinese burials. Above all, the burning of one's parents' bodies and the destruction of their bones was antithetical to the filial piety at the core of Confucian ethics. Cremation was therefore prohibited, as recorded in the eighteenth century annals of Lijiang: "It is forbidden to burn and discard bones; proper burial must be taught."[12]

In Lijiang, as in other frontier regions, the Qing reformed local dress. In 1724, the magistrate Yang Bi described the Naxi people as wearing 'curled bun and ear rings, and weird costumes', and concluded that 'it should be easy to dress and teach people to wear normal clothes.' Obviously, in his opinion, Naxi traditional dress was not proper clothing and the Naxi ought to conform to the dress standards of Qing China. A century later, in the 'Book of Famous Officials' of the *Lijiang Prefectural Records*, it is said that Wang Houqing, a native of Shandong province who attained the rank of Jinshi (进士), which is to say that he had graduated from the highest imperial examinations, was appointed to Lijiang.[13] Although Lijiang had previously been under the gradual influence of Han custom, men and women's clothing, weddings, and funeral ceremonies did not as yet follow the Han custom. Appointed in 1820, Wang apparently spared no effort to enforce the necessary measures to achieve widespread cultural reforms and after Wang worked hard to carry out the reforms, the local people changed their customs.

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 *Lijiang Fu Zhi Gao. Ming huan zhi*. 乾隆. 丽江府志稿.名宦志 [Qianlong. Lijiang prefectural records; illustrious magistrates] Lijiangzhi Bangongshi, 1991.
13 Ibid.

Along with changes in burial customs and dress, the Qing administrators imposed changes on the local marriage customs to suit Confucian ethics and moral standards. With mandatory assimilation, young Naxi men and women were deprived of the local custom of free love and became the victims of Confucianism. Traditional Naxi marriages, clan alliances, and family hierarchies, although patrilineal and patriarchal, had been flexible arrangements. Under the policy of assimilation, this traditional system was transformed into a rigid system of arranged marriage and of absolutely binding betrothal promises. Confucian moral standards imposed a heavy spiritual burden on Naxi youth.

The distribution of love suicide rates in the Naxi regions shows the part played by Confucian reforms in the development of this tragic custom, for the rate of love suicides was highest on the Lijiang plain, in Lashi, Huangshan, and Baisha townships, and next in the mountainous areas surrounding the plain area, as, for example, in Tai'an and Longshan. The plain area is the traditional political, economic and cultural center of Lijiang, although there had been Han-educated scholars among the Naxi of this region for several centuries. After the Qing reforms, the Lijiang plain area became profoundly influenced by Han culture and ethics as Confucian education, imperial rules and regulations, etiquette and customs became widely accepted. In the region, illicit love was now seen as a disgrace and there was extreme contempt for the lovers who committed suicide.

By contrast, in the rural areas, where people lived far away from the ruling centers of the Qing administration and where they were least influenced by Han culture, such as in the townships of Sanba in Zhongdian county (now Shangri La County) in Yunnan, in E'ya in Sichuan, and in the townships of Baoshan and Fengke in Lijiang prefecture, suicide was much rarer than in the Lijiang plain area. In these more remote places, the ancient customs of the Naxi people were not strongly affected by Han culture. The Naxi people were not completely consumed by a system of ethics antithetical to their own traditions. To cite as an example, Eya was established as a garrison town by the Mu chiefs of the Ming dynasty, and settled by Naxi soldiers. To this day, the people of E'ya have retained many traditional customs as well as polygamy, and there has been no custom of love suicide among them.

We can also compare the situation of the Naxi people of Lijiang with that of the Na (Mosuo) people of Yongning in Ninglang County to confirm that 'Reforming the Barbarians by Implementing Han Customs' contributed to the suffering of the Naxi people. During the Ming dynasty, Yongning Prefecture was set up under the hereditary rule of the Ah chief (also of the Na people), who was appointed as the local official. When the Qing dynasty later carried out the policy of removing native chieftains and instituting appointed officials in their place, the imperial government continued the policy of indirect rule in some areas, including along the Lancang (Mekong), Nujiang, and Irrawaddy rivers and, in Yongning, on the eastern shores of the Yangtze River.[14] Yongning thus became one of the few remaining areas to retain hereditary native chieftainship. Indeed, the system of indirect rule that had been established in the thirteenth century by the Yuan emperor remained in place in Yongning through the Qing Dynasty and into the Republic of China. In fact, the Na people of Yongning have maintained their matrilineal social system and their customs of visiting

14 Wei Yuan, *Shengwuji. Yongzhengxinanyi gailiuji*, 圣武记.雍正西南夷改流记 [The Sacred Wars. Records of the administrative reform of Yongzheng in Southwestern China] [1842] Zhonghuashuju, 1984.

relationships to the present day. In Yongning, both men and women have considerable sexual freedom, and people can choose their lovers according to their wishes. Love suicide is unknown to them.

The customs governing love and marriage among the people of Yongning and Yanyuan, and in other places among the more remote mountainous areas of Lijiang, are in sharp contrast with those found in Lijiang plain area. This contrast confirms that marriage and sexual relations found in Lijiang plain area in the first half of the twentieth century were the product of the ongoing influence of Confucian culture. The farther from the Lijiang plain area, which is to say, from the political, economic and cultural center, the weaker the Confucian influence. And love suicide took place in Lijiang plain, at the political, economic and cultural center, which was not Confucian in more ancient times – not in the remote regions.

The extreme measures instituted by the Qing reforms caused profound tensions in the Naxi society of the Lijiang plain. The Naxi, who had inherited a set of traditional values and culture thousands of years old, were forced into sudden and brutal cultural changes. These changes were most harmful to young people. There arose a fierce conflict between the social system and human nature, and between the traditional culture and the introduced culture. The rigid patriarchal system of Confucianism, the conflict of values between the newly established system of arranged marriage and the traditional customs of free love, and the harsh new concepts about women's chastity all contributed to young people opting for love suicide. The most evident and direct cause of this tragedy lay with notions of chastity. However, the evolution of love suicide into a historical social custom cannot be attributed solely to structural causes. The Naxi's traditional outlook on life and death, their unique national temperament, were also significant factors.[15]

**Conflict between traditional perspectives on love and sexuality and Confucian feudal ethics**

Naxi customs of love marriage are geographically bound. The joys and sorrows of the world were divided east and west of the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, and in Naxi country, love suicide was most prominent on the Lijiang plain and surrounding regions whilst in the remote mountain areas of Baoshan, Fengke, or Mingyin, few people took their lives. The reformed marriage system was a major factor in promoting love suicide. After 1723, the system of arranged marriage combined with Confucian ethics became much stricter. Under the impact of the mandatory reforms, the Naxi people developed a dual and contradictory system whereby youth retained the customs of freedom before marriage even as the selection of a marriage partner became entirely devoid of freedom of choice.

The Qing reforms were more forcefully implemented in Lijiang than in some other regions. According to the Lijiang prefectural records, a Hall of Loyalty, a Hall of Filial Piety, and a Hall of Righteousness were constructed in Lijiang in the second year of Emperor Qianlong (1712).[16] A chapter dedicated to righteousness in the *Lijiang Prefectural Records* includes a list of chaste

15 See: Yang Fuquan, *Shenqi de xunqin*, 神奇的殉情 [The Mystery of Love Suicide] Hong Kong Sanlian Bookshop 1994; and Yang Fuquan, *Duoyuanwenhua yu Naxi shehui*, 多元文化与纳西社会 [Multiculturalism and Naxi Society], Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1998.
16 *Qianlong Lijiang fuzhi*, 乾隆. 丽江府志 [Qianlong. Lijiang Prefectural Records], Lijiang Fuzhi Bangongshi, 1991.

women and bears witness to the growing importance attached to chastity in Naxi society. From 1723 onwards, Chinese language literature produced in Lijiang repeatedly emphasized ethics and integrity. Joseph F. Rock, who resided in Lijiang for nearly three decades before the advent of the People's Republic of China, wrote that the Naxi of the Lijiang plain area regarded illegitimate pregnancy and illegitimate births as unspeakable disgrace, and that illicit lovers were utterly despised by the local society.[17] Women who became pregnant outside of the betrothal arrangements committed suicide. A feudal outlook on women's chastity completely transformed Naxi morality, taking deep roots in Naxi psychology and persisted well into the Republican period (1912-1949). In my own field investigation, informants confirmed to me that in the Lijiang plain area, many women committed suicide because they were pregnant out of wedlock. These women were afraid of being mercilessly attacked by public opinion. Most of the women's lovers died with them.

Love suicide is depicted in the Naxi Dongba manuscripts. The story of the Kaimeijjemilji, the first Naxi woman who committed love suicide, is told in a ritual dedicated to the souls of lovers who have committed suicide *Lv Bber Lv Ssa* [the young herdsman's journey]. The direct cause of her death lies in an arranged marriage and expectations of female chastity. That is, Kaimeijjemilji is pregnant from a lover who is not her betrothed; she has broken the promise made by her parents, and she must die.

However, if we compare the love and marriage customs described in many myths and legends recorded in the Dongba manuscripts and investigate the customs of Naxi people in different places, we can see that the concept of chastity was not native to ancient Naxi society, and that it is the product of more recent feudal ethics. From the Dongba manuscripts, it is clear that the Naxi once had customs of sexual freedom. For example, in the Naxi creation myth, the hero Cosseilee'ee (who is still worshipped today as the first ancestor of the Naxi people) married the heavenly daughter Ceiheibbubami. But Cosseilee'ee also lived with the female ghost, Lumeimu'ee who gave birth to three children, while after her marriage to Cosseilee'ee, Ceiheebubami cohabited with Yussolasser, with whom she also had children.

The ancestral heroine Eyidunumi lived with several men, among them Meesseepeizei, Keezzeeloshe and Leemeimeeshv, and she gave birth to three children from different fathers. In the Dongba manuscripts dealing with the purification ceremony *Cee Na Nee Che Shu* [To Purify a Black Goat], Ceezhuajjimu, wife of the White tribe chieftain Meeleedduzzee, went to the lake of Meeleelddajji to fetch water, and there she had sexual relations with Meeleelshvzzee, the chief of the Black tribe. In the story of the ancient Naxi hero *Seebajjibbu*, the wife of another White tribe leader cohabitated with the chief of the Black tribe, Meeleeshvzzee. In the Dongba story of the Naxi ancestor *Galaiciu*,[18] Ceezhuagemu, a princess of the White tribe, lived with Miseingewu, a prince of the Black tribe, for three night; in the ritual text, *Su Shua Na* [Burning the Black Ritual Wood] this same princess Ceezhuagemu had an affair with subordinates of Meeleeshvzzee, the chief of the Black tribe, and gave birth to a son. In Naxi mythology, the wife of Yulishuabbu (son of the earth god) had an affair while her husband was out hunting. The leader of the Black tribe asked his daughter Geessanamo to seduce and live with Ddossoalu, prince of the White tribe. Indeed, even

17 Joseph F. Rock, 'The Romance of K'a-ma-gyu-gkyi', *Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. XXXIX, 1939.
18 Also spelt Gelaiqiu (see Mathieu in this issue).

after Ddossoalu was captured and imprisoned, Geessanamo continued to live with him. In the Dongba manuscripts, there are many other stories about warring tribes sending beautiful princesses to charm and seduce their enemies. We can conclude that if the Naxi people used a honeypot strategy in warfare, women could not have been required to observe chastity. Most of the characters mentioned above, who have liaisons or live temporarily with their partners, are ancestors, heroes, and wise men, both mortals and immortals of the Naxi mythology. They are praised in many Dongba manuscripts and there is no concealment of the fact that these females once had sexual freedom and multiple partners. The behaviour which was abhorred by later generations of Naxi raises no opprobrium in the ancient Naxi ritual literature.

Indeed, polygamy, sexual freedom, and flexible sexual ethics are all consistent with the stories told in the Dongba manuscripts. In the Dongba manuscripts, it is often mentioned that 'a good man travels through nine villages and obtains lovers in nine places', and it is evident from the numerous stories and myths that polygamy and sexual freedom were socially permissible among the Naxi's ancestors, and that no concepts of chastity restricted women's sexual behavior.

Importantly, the traditions of free love were preserved in many Naxi areas into the contemporary period. In Eya, as we saw, the Naxi have customs of polygamy and polygyny. The people of Eya are descended from Naxi soldiers who were garrisoned to guard the Tibetan territories held by the Mu chiefs during the Ming period. There is no doubt that their sexual customs have preserved aspects of traditional Naxi custom. Besides Yongning, as mentioned above, free love was practiced in Baidi, Zhongdian county, and in Yanyuan, Sichuan, which were all part of Mu feudal estates during the Ming dynasty. But sexual freedom was also found in Lijiang itself, in an area which became deeply influenced by Han culture. Indeed, quite in spite of the Qing reforms, the Naxi did not implement the segregation of the sexes according to Confucian norms, and people of all ages kept the custom of free social intercourse between men and women almost everywhere in the Lijiang area, and along with this, opportunities for youth to engage in love before marriage. Naxi parents did not interfere with their children's friendships and social relations, and were largely blind to the love relationships young people developed before they were married.

Seen against this historical and social context, the development of the Naxi love suicide custom is best understood as the result of a fiercely conflicting cultural script that opposed the foreign value system of Confucian morality and ancient customs of free social intercourse and free love – which the Naxi maintained beyond the Confucian reforms with dire consequences.

**Women and Love Suicide**

Based on several years of research, I am able to confirm that in pre-Liberation Lijiang, the number of women who committed love suicide was much greater than the number of men. In many villages, Naxi women committed suicide either alone or in groups. Women were more inclined to die for love than men, and their determination to commit love suicide was stronger than men's. Indeed, Naxi society placed more value on men than women, and if we make a serious analysis of the gender system, it is evident that such gender disparity was not an ancient feature of Naxi culture but was bolstered by the feudal ideals that came into Lijiang with the abolishment of the native prefecture in 1723. The Dongba manuscripts, the historical records, and Naxi folk customs all

confirm that at some earlier stage of history, Naxi women had high social status and that they played a significant role in social life, religion, and war.

The Naxi people refer to themselves as 'people who worship Heaven': *Naxi mee biu sso*. Their most important ritual is the Sacrifice to Heaven, when the Naxi come together to commemorate the origins of their people and to celebrate the cohesion of their lineages. During the Sacrifice to Heaven, the Naxi propitiate the heavenly god Zela'apu and the heavenly goddess Ceihee'ezee, who are the parents of Ceiheibubami, the first female ancestor of the Naxi, and the main object of worship is none other than the matrilineal ancestor Ceiheibubami. Besides the Sacrifice to Heaven, the Naxi worship many goddesses, and have many myths and stories about goddesses. Goddesses are also the cultural heroes who invented modes of production and the life skills. Fearless, intelligent and resourceful heroines, most of whom are considered Naxi ancestors, feature in many Naxi myths and legends

In ancient times, Naxi women played an important role in religious life. In the ancient Dongba manuscripts, Naxi ritual specialists were female diviners who had the ritual titles of *pa*. Naxi religious lore tells that three hundred and sixty books of divination were given to the Naxi people by Perzzeesamei, the great Diviner in Heaven. Yet, in the twentieth century, Naxi women were almost completely excluded from religious activities in the contemporary period. Today, there are no *pa* ritual specialists, but there are a few Naxi female shamans who go by the title of *Sani* or *Saipa*, who are undoubtedly the descendants of these ancient female ritual specialists.

Taking into account a range of sources - the Naxi Dongba manuscripts, ancient Chinese historical records, and traditional Naxi customs - we can see that, in a more distant past, Naxi women were afforded a traditional respect, that they played an important social role, and enjoyed high social status. Naxi patriarchal values developed gradually in the feudal society established during the Ming period, and very much hardened after the integration of Lijiang under direct imperial administration. Lijiang was among the minority regions where Confucian reforms were most forcefully implemented. We have seen above that within two years of the removal of the native prefecture in 1723, three Confucian temples were constructed and a register of chaste women was established.

In the thirteenth year of Guangxu 光绪 (1887 CE), Huang Jinxiang was the prefect of Lijiang prefecture. He formulated the maxims for governing Lijiang, and many regulations to suppress women. For example, he strictly prohibited women from participating in religious activities performed by lay people, such as burning incense in the temples. He judged that the colorful clothing of Naxi women and their loud speech and laughter, along with public mingling of men and women, taught stealing, eroticism, and obscenity.[19] For these, he decreed severe punishments: "If a man allows his wife and daughter to go to the temples to hold a ritual of burning incense, he will be beaten forty times with wooden batons, as it is the sin of the husband and father."[20] Huang Jinxiang even banned women from watching the lanterns during the Lantern Festival, because he believed it was shameless for women to be in the public space in groups. Women were only allowed to watch from the gates of their homes and were forbidden to play with the lights. Fathers and husbands

19 Huangjin Xian: *Zhì lì zhh lì, Guh lì shh lì nii,* 治丽箴言, 光绪十九年 [Maxims for Governing Lijiang, 19th year of Guangxu Changchunfaningwentang , Kunming, 1893.
20 Ibid.

were punished for women who broke the law. [21]

In ancient times, Naxi people had a custom of following the father's name and the mother's surname. However, after the abolition of the native prefecture, Qing imperial officials, proceeding from extreme patriarchal values, strictly forbade men to marry into their wives' families and to adopt their wives' family names, declaring that it was shameful and despicable for the husband to follow his wife's surname. Children who carried the family names of their mothers were deemed illegitimate and unfilial. To be matrilineal was said to respect one's wife by destroying one's ancestors. In the *Maxims for Governing Lijiang*, it is written that “Those who raise sons of different surnames and bring chaos to the clans and lineages will be punished by sixty strokes. The same punishment applies to those who give their sons to families of different surnames.”[22]

During the Qing Dynasty, tragic and bitter songs became popular among Naxi women, reflecting the patriarchal views that placed so much more value on sons than daughters in Lijiang. Some of these songs relate concerns that clan relatives will inherit the family property if the family has only daughters. Others tell of the suffering of women who are not treated as full family members, who are despised and abused, and are deprived of the warmth of the world. Many of these bitter songs tell of women's desire not to live in this world, and of not wanting to be reborn as women in another life. The songs often conclude with thoughts of suicide. In these songs, the suffering, deep sorrow, and resentment experienced by Naxi women are expressed in low and dignified tones. These expressions of grief and resentment are rarely encountered in the ancient Dongba manuscripts. In the Dongba texts, women's lives are depicted as free and unrestrained.

Many of these women's songs, which became so extensive during the Qing dynasty, reflect the loss of a historical tradition and profound social change. These songs bear witness to the drastic reversal of women's social position as a result of institutional and culture reforms. They express the sorrows of lives lived in a social environment contrary to tradition, lives that have been crushed physically and mentally.

**Conclusion**

The Naxi love suicide custom was a complex social problem, further complicated by layers of cultural inputs. Over a long history, many young Naxi walked the path to love suicide. The immediate causes of their death may have varied, as each individual had a personal reason for wishing to die. However, such individual factors were not isolated elements but indeed related to a whole. We can only understand this strange cultural phenomenon and solve the mystery of suicide on this scale by taking into account the larger picture: culture, society, and history. On this count, we should not ignore the part that Indigenous cultural factors played in love suicide. The Naxi people's own worldview, beliefs in ghosts and gods, and their attitudes to life and death, nature, love and sex that make up the Naxi collective psyche also contributed to the mysterious development of love suicide. The traditional Naxi spirit of ‘fearing no death' and the belief that a paradise (Naxi: *Ngvlvyechelgeo*) in the next life awaited lovers who committed suicide had a catalytic effect on the development of this heartbreaking custom and the leading role that women

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.

played in this tragedy.

At a historical juncture, the Naxi people developed a set of cultural values which were inextricably linked to their own cultural traditions. Thus, love suicide among the Naxi was not only a tragedy that shocked both Chinese and foreign observers, it was a very unique cultural phenomenon, and a unique Naxi custom. In this paper, I have only explored part of this story: the role of the political system and the part played by the social and cultural reforms that were imposed on the Naxi in the 18th century. There can be no doubt that under the Confucian value system, women almost entirely lost their former status and freedom, and suffered humiliation. This social transformation amounted to a physical and mental torture that became unbearable for Naxi women.

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# Reflections of Mosuo Lore

**LAMU GATUSA**
**TRANS. CHRISTINE MATHIEU**

**Abstract**
*The Mosuo people of southwest China have a rich oral literature. The Mosuo Daba religion contains hundreds of ritual texts incorporating incantations, myths and legends. Over a long history, the Mosuo people have told stories about their deities, mythical and local heroes, past feudal rulers and the natural world that surrounds them. They have told stories to educate their children. They have developed proverbs that hold the moral and social teachings of the community. They have also put words to traditional tunes to express their joys and sorrows, their adventures on the caravan trail, the love between men and women and the love of their mothers. The selected texts in this small collection include stories of the Mountain Goddess Gamu, the patron deity of the Mosuo people; courtship songs; songs of motherly love; proverbs extolling the Mosuo matricultural world; and an animal fable suffused with humorous pragmatism that offers a glance into past feudal relations.*

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*Les Mosuo du sud-ouest de la Chine possèdent une riche littérature orale. La religion daba des mosuo contient des centaines de textes rituels incorporant des incantations, des mythes et des légendes. Au cours des siècles, les Mosuo se sont transmis des histoires à propos de leurs divinités, de leurs héros mythiques et locaux, de leurs anciens seigneurs féodaux et du monde naturel qui les entoure. Ils ont raconté des histoires pour éduquer leurs enfants. Ils ont développé des proverbes qui contiennent les enseignements moraux et sociaux de la communauté. Ils ont également composé des paroles sur des airs traditionnels pour exprimer leurs joies et leurs peines, leurs aventures sur le chemin des caravanes, l'amour entre hommes et femmes et l'amour de leurs mères. Les textes sélectionnés dans cette petite collection comprennent des histoires sur la déesse de la montagne, Gamu, qui est aussi la divinité patronne du peuple Mosuo; des chansons qui traduisent l'amour entre les hommes et les femmes, mais aussi l'amour des enfants pour leurs mères; des proverbes qui exaltent le monde matriculturel mosuo; et une fable animale imprégnée d'un pragmatisme rempli d'humour qui offre un regard particulier sur les relations féodales du temps passé.*

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**The Goddess Gamu**

On the twenty-fifth day of the seventh lunar month, we Mosuo celebrate the mountain deities. Among these mountain deities there are both goddesses and gods, but the most important of them all, the deity who is worshipped with the most solemnity and the most important rituals, is the mountain goddess Gamu. Gamu has no rivals amongst the mountain gods. She towers over the Yongning plain and she looks like a crouching lion, so that other nationalities call her the Lion Mountain. To the Mosuo, she is only the Goddess Gamu. The Mosuo sing praises to her beauty, and tell her stories in many legends. She is the goddess of beauty, love, protection, and birth, and she is endowed with all powers and qualities. To the Mosuo, the Mountain Goddess Gamu is a monument to women. She is the deity who holds the world in balance.

The Mosuo believe that Gamu presides over the fertility of the people of Yongning, over the success of their harvests, the reproduction of animals. She presides over the health of women, their beauty, unions and birth. She not only blesses and protects all living creatures, she holds first place amongst all the mountain deities around her. All surrounding deities esteem and admire her, and are devoted to her. She bestows favours upon them. She has many lovers amongst the gods.

Every twenty-fifth day of the seventh lunar month, all Mosuo households go out to celebrate, helping the elderly and carrying the small children. They wear their finest clothes. They take food for a picnic and, singing and dancing, they arrive at the foot of the mountain. There they light juniper branches to honour the Goddess. They then form a long line, so that everyone in turn may offer prayers to the Goddess to ask for her blessings, to grant rain and wind in the year to come and peace to humans and animals. The lamas then chant to worship the mountain Goddess, praying that she may protect humanity against disasters and grant people good fortune.

On this festival day, people come to the sacred cave and put up tents, they eat picnic food, compete in horse races, wrestling; they play on swings. Everyone has fun. When dark has fallen, young women and men spend the rest of the night in the mountain, speaking of love, singing love duets, and the Goddess bestows upon their love the promise of happy times.

**Stories of the Goddess**

In their cult of the Goddess, the Mosuo do not only worship a deity. The Goddess Gamu is the shining reflection of Mosuo love life. When, in the past, outsiders asked the Mosuo about men and women, about love and visiting relationships, the Mosuo would reply without hesitation: 'The Goddess has love relationships.' Because what they know of the relationships between women and men, they have learned from the Goddess. Of course, it is not the legends that have given rise to visiting relationships, but the custom of visiting relationships that has created the legends. Human beings must make sense of their existence and sanction their own customs. With the passage of time, however, stories acquire a moral strength and spiritual will. There are many interesting legends about the Goddess Gamu. I recall three of them below.

*Gamu and the whirlwind*
A long, very long time ago, Gamu lived in Bozhe village. She was a very intelligent and quick-witted girl as well as very beautiful. On her eighteenth birthday, a God in heaven saw her beauty. And on the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month, he created a whirlwind that carried her into the sky. All the people in Yongning were horrified. They came running out of their houses and fields, shouting and screaming. They shouted so loudly that the god became alarmed and either in fear or in a moment of clumsiness, he let the girl go. Unfortunately, she had no means of returning to the earth, and so she turned into the mountain. And now she stands between Heaven and Earth and her soul has become a goddess.

*Gamu gambles in Tibet*
Following the conversion of Yongning to Lamaism, the legend integrated new elements, in contents and meanings. Accordingly, stories now tell that on the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month, all Goddesses go to Tibet and all people celebrate all goddesses on this day. When the Goddesses reach Tibet, there are celebrations and amusements. Gambling is a favourite game. When it comes time to take part in the festivities in Tibet, and especially in the gambling games, Gamu is the most powerful of all. When she sits down at the table and plays, Gamu's presence is felt by all of the other gods. When she displays her full divine powers and wins, all the gods honour her. If she happens to lose, however, she will display her anger for all to see. The skies will then darken over Yongning, torrential rain will fall, and the crops will be ruined. People and animals will no longer be at peace. To ensure that the Goddess would engage the other deities in the gambling contest with fun in her heart, the Mosuo people thought of something. On the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month, all the households go out to the foot of the mountain. They wear beautiful red and green clothes, they sing and dance, all to boost the Goddess's morale and encourage her to defeat the other gods and either restore or keep the peace.

*Gamu has love affairs with the mountain gods*
Legend has it that Gamu has many lovers. Some are short-term, like Cezhe, Hewa, and Ashao, and she also has a long term lover: Azhapula. Gamu and Cezhe met once, by chance, and for a night loved each other. But Azhapula, who had been riding on the wind, happened across them unexpectedly. He saw Cezhe and Gamu making love and in a single breath, drew his sword and cut down Cezhe - which is why Cezhe Mountain is now missing a peak. Another time, Gamu and Ashao were arguing, and Ashao decided he would ride away and leave for Dali.[1] He wanted to look for another girlfriend in the blue mountains. He had decided to break things off with Gamu. But Gamu could not bear to part from him, and so she mounted her white horse and took off after him. Pulling up close, she managed to grab onto his vest, and she held onto it for dear life. And so they galloped away with Ashao trying to escape from Gamu and Gamu holding onto him. They rode like this for so long that they did not notice that dawn had broken, that the rooster had already crowed, and that the light of the rising sun was shining on their love. And so the mountain god Ashao was struck down, and he was stuck on earth for ever. But Gamu was still holding onto his vest and today the two mountains are still linked together.

1 Which is to say, for somewhere foreign and very far away.

**Songs**

*Three songs about love*
Love and courtship songs have a set tune upon which would-be lovers set their own words. In other words, the tune is set but the words are improvised. The Mosuo have a taboo about singing courtship songs near their homes, and since the courtship tune is known by all, the taboo applies not only to singing but also to whistling or playing the tune on an instrument. Courtship songs should be sung in the wild, in the mountains or in the fields. Mosuo courtship songs never celebrate love as such. Women and men express their love for one another, but they do not praise love as a category of thought, as an ideal or psychological state. In Mosuo language, there is no term to identify romantic or sexual love as exists in Chinese (性爱, *xingai*), and the words Axia (denoting a woman) and Azhu (denoting a man) are best understood as 'intimate friends'.

Courtship songs are usually composed of several couplets, by which the would-be lovers open a dialogue, responding to each other with wit and innuendo until the time comes to reveal their true feelings. As singers use metaphors, their words are imbued with rich meaning, not all of which may be translated into Chinese or other language and is inevitably lost in translation. Love songs are not always sung by couples, and individuals may also go into the woods or the mountains to sing about their beloved, to express their joy or the pain of rejection.

*Rocking the Boat from Side to Side*

M: Lake Lugu is so wide and grand
It is difficult for the wild goose to cross
W: Don't be frightened of the width of the lake
Just rock the boat from side to side

M: At first, I hesitated to go after the fish
But the fish has eyes of gold
W: At first, I didn't think of letting the dog after the deer
But the deer horns are precious

M: I thought of riding a horse across the lake
But the waters of the lake bolted and it was hard to get on the saddle
W: I thought of plucking stars from the sky
But the white clouds would not give me a bridge

M: The azelea and the camellia
Prefer to bloom on the mountain
W: I thought of the blooms on the hill
But I fear that frost might follow the spring

M: I have walked around the dark and dense forests
I have swam across Lugu Lake
W: I walked across the mountains and found a valley

But I did not see my Axia

M: I rode a white cloud as a horse
To stroll the sky and roam the earth, who will come with me?
W: I rode the north wind as a horse
To stroll the sky and roam the earth, I will come with you.

*When You Reach the Sea, Don't Forget the Little Stream* (title of song)

M: I am a pine tree and you a cypress tree
Let us be together on this festival day.[2]
W: I am the clear waters flowing from the snowy mountain peaks
You are the river; let the crest of our waves splash together

W: Azhu, when you reach the unforgettable sea
Don't forget the small mountain stream
M: Waters flow incessantly and froth likewise ebbs and flows
Your Azhu's heart is not carved from wood or stone

M: The caravan road is long, oh so long
My intentions are long as the caravan road
W: I have finished weaving a beautiful hemp belt
My caravan brother, come back quickly

M: The spring wind is already blowing across the fields
Why are the flower buds still closed?
W: Azhu, my heart, please do not lay blame
It is not that the flowers cannot love, but that the earth is much too cold

M: From within the earth, grass and cereals grow
Do the cereal crops we grow also have grass seeds?
W: My Azhu only needs to find the words
For me to withstand the fog and frosts of this hard winter

W: When the leaves are no longer green, they fall upon the earth
My clever Azhu, I don't know how you feel deep in your heart.
M: After the leaves have fallen, the time comes for trees to turn green again
You know what your Azhu has in his heart, even if I do not speak

W: When Azhu sings, his words are so beautiful
But is it so in the depth of his heart? Is his heart as beautiful as his song?
M: Azhu's heart is bright and light
It is as clear as day is from night.[3]

2 Pine and cypress branches are burned together as offerings to the gods on festival days.
3 Meaning that he has no mixed feelings.

W: To hear that Azhu's song is as intoxicating as my own
My heart twists as a hemp rope
M: Let me undo the turmoil that twists the hemp
Let me follow my friend's tender affection.

*Heartbreak*

The two of us are like eyes and eyebrows
One life together yet they never meet

Please do not drive stakes in all the trees
And if you happen to trip, it will be only your own fault

My mother is thinking of me and calling me home
But in my heart, I cannot lose you, Azhu!

Everyday, I watch the birds fly overhead
But I cannot ask them to be my messengers

I fear that if I were to trust the birds with my news
They may carry my words to the wrong person

We no longer walk together
Yet, in the beginnings in our heart, we had not thought...

My Azhu, in ten years we may never meet
Again in the high mountains again

My Azhu who lives near Lugu Lake
In ten years, we may never see one another

Please so not suppress your heart, please sing again
My face is feverish, my heart is crying

You left me to go live so far away
Please do not forget the words we told each other

When you reach the high mountains, and dizzy
You happen to see the snow lotus

Don't think less of the small flower
That grows hidden by the side of the stream

Don't think that I do not think of you in my heart

Every drop of my blood hangs on your body

In all places, rice plants grow short
Don't think of your crop growing higher than others

Now I cannot see even your shadow
Actually, I don't even know where you are.

*Two songs in praise of mother*
*Gratitude*

I can forget all troublesome and unpleasant things
But I could never forget my mother's love

The sound of mother's loving voice
Is like a cup of sweet wine

When I was small my mother took care of me just as birds care for their young
And yet, when we grew up, her sons and daughters flew away like the eagle

My mother suffered every hardship to raise me
Now that I have grown up I must be her loving friend

The world over, mothers are the same
The care for their children with all their love

No one understands my feelings
As my mother knows the depth of my heart

So long as I had my mother by my side
I could eat no more than three bowls of rice a day
and yet my heart would be filled with sweetness

The Azhu to whom I will give my heart
Will satisfy my mother's wishes

My mother put her whole heart into raising me
In return, I will always hold her in my heart

If it were not for my mother's guiding hand
I would not know right from wrong

When my mother passes away, I will never see her again
While she is alive and healthy, I must take good care of her.

The house where my mother gave birth to me
Is poor but filled with joy

When my mother will no longer be of this world
Her love will live in my heart

The mother who raised me was very poor
But I could not move away and lose her

I do not care that she be rich or poor, noble or humble
I only care to make her happy

When I walk in the mountains with the wind on my face
I think of how my mother touched me so softly when I was a child

The person who raised me in this world is my mother
As long as I live in this world, I want to show her how good I may be

*A Son Left His Mother* (to marry uxorilocally)

I left to marry in other people's house
But how could I lose my mother and leave my home?

When I was young I did not understand my mother's heart
Now I have left my mother to live at home on her own

When I will go home, I will sing all the way
Because I will be returning to my mother's side

I heard my mother calling me home
But I had nothing to bring her

It was the voice of a sparrow calling in the high mountains
It sounded just like the voice of my mother calling me

The road was long, so long. The farther I walked
Along the road, and the more I thought of my mother

When I arrived at the crossing in the mountains, I forgot my way
But I did not forget my mother's advice

So I kept going and happily found my way
While my poor mother was so lonesome

I lost my mother to come to your door
Don't think it your good fortune

It is only because I would not lose your daughter
That I lost the threshold of my house to enter yours.

***Mosuo Proverbs***

One may have 990 Axia but only one mother.

To be handsome and capable, Mosuo boys follow the teaching of their maternal uncles; to be handsome and capable, Mosuo girls follow the teachings of their mothers.

When a man marries into the house, it is to become a servant. When a woman marries out, it is to become the head of the household.

If the oxen and the horses are in one pen, they will not be at peace. Likewise, people who are not of the same lineage cannot live in harmony.

A horse cannot carry two saddles, a woman cannot foster two households.

Chickens hatched out of the same nest don't fight; children born of one mother are united.

One forgets the taste of sweet things, but not the taste of bitterness.

One sees the slightest flaw in others but our eyes cannot see our own faces.

If people live a reasonable life, they will not trip on the road when they walk.

The power of the horse is in his four legs, a person's power is in the heart.

One cannot drink ferrous water and one cannot eat mud; generations to come cannot be ashamed of their ancestors.

We don't put salt in milk; good friends likewise do not lie.

Those who dig holes everywhere are bound to fall in one of them one day.

Draught animals that grow long tails do not need to take into account what lies at their rear end; since people do not have tails, they must at time worry about what happens next.[4]

4 This is so because the future lies behind and the past ahead – since we can see the past but not the future.

Those who have never cut bamboo do not know how smooth the bamboo is; those who have not entered the path of truth and reason do not know how hard the road can be.

One should not ride a tired mule or listen to people's gossip.

When the toad drinks water, it is never content; when people find money, they are never satisfied with their lot.

A life without laughter is as awful as soup without salt.

The Mosuo rely on the caravan trade for wealth, the Han rely on the earth.

The Mosuo rely on hemp and earth for their clothes; they rely on the mountain for their food.

***Fables about Rabbit***

In which Rabbit represents the common people, because rabbits, just like the common people, are many and all look the same; Tiger represents the Mosuo feudal lord.

*How Rabbit grew long ears - and the trickster was tricked*
Once upon a time, Rabbit knocked on the Grandmother's door. He told her a heart-wrenching story and begged for milk. Moved by his sorry tale, Grandmother gave him some milk. The next day, Rabbit pretended to be another rabbit, and again came knocking on Grandmother's door. He told another heart-wrenching story, and Grandmother, moved by the dismal tale, gave him some milk. The next day, Rabbit, pretended to be yet another rabbit, and again came knocking on Grandmother's door with a tragic story. Grandmother, moved by the tragic tale, gave Rabbit some milk. On the fourth day, Rabbit pretended to be yet another rabbit and again he came knocking on Grandmother's door with a sorrowful tale, and Grandmother, moved by the sorrowful story, gave him some milk. Rabbit, pleased with himself, returned the next day, and the day after that and again – at which point, Grandmother began to think that something was odd, and she thought of a trick. When she brought the milk to Rabbit, she spilt a few drops on his fur. Rabbit - too pleased with himself and emboldened by his own success - did not notice a thing. The next day, when he came knocking at the door, Grandmother saw that his fur was still sticky, and understood that she had not been helping a series of unfortunate rabbits but only one greedy tricky rabbit. When Rabbit was uncovered, he cried in shame and pulled on his ears out of desperation and remorse. And that is how Rabbit got his long ears.

*Clever Rabbit*
Once upon a time, Rabbit saw Tiger coming his way. There was nowhere to run and so Rabbit thought of a clever way out. He climbed up a tree and hung onto the tree trunk as tightly as he could. Tiger approached him and asked: 'Are you not the rabbit that just played a trick on me?' And Tiger's eyes began to dart up and down as he gauged the best means of climbing up the tree.

Rabbit pretended not to notice him and ignored him.

So Tiger asked again: 'Are you not the rabbit that just played a trick on me?' And this time, Rabbit answered: 'Oh, it's you, Tiger. I am so sorry, I must apologise, but I was busy with my own affairs. You were asking if I were the rabbit that just tricked you? Well, how could a little rabbit like me trick a great tiger like you? Besides, there are so many rabbits in the world, how can you tell them apart? Now, the rabbit who tricked you, tricked you today but I have been up here trying to steady this tree since yesterday. When would I have found the time to trick you?'

Rabbit then explained how Heaven would punish him if he failed to steady the tree.[5] To which he added, that having been hard at work to steady this tree for a whole day and a half, Heaven was sure to come by soon and reward him with something very nice to eat. At these words, Tiger's ears pricked up, and for an instant, he looked thoughtful. 'Little brother' said Tiger after a little pause, 'would you like a helping hand at steadying this tree?' Rabbit hesitated, then said: 'A helping hand would be good but... I am a little worried that you may not have enough strength for the job...'

That did not please Tiger who thought to himself: 'How dare this little rabbit underestimate me, king of the animals?' And so he said: 'You little rabbit can surely tell a good joke! If *you* can steady this tree, how could I not do it? I am so much stronger than you! Come on, get down now, I'll take over!' Without much ado, Tiger reached out for Rabbit, flung him off the tree, and embraced the trunk in his big paws.

Rabbit, seeing the enthusiasm Tiger was putting in embracing the tree, felt like having a bit of a laugh but he thought better of it. In a grave tone, he said: 'Older brother, you must take care of not relaxing your position. Meanwhile, I shall go and take a look around to see if I can catch a glance of Heaven coming with some goodies. Just keep hanging on!' Rabbit then went off.

Tiger spent the whole night hanging onto the tree. At dawn, he realised that he had been tricked. He slowly released his grip, every part of his body screaming in pain. And he was very hungry.

**Author biography**

**Lamu Gatusa** (Shih Gaofeng) is associate professor at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, in Kunming, China. He is a scholar and a poet and the three-time winner of China's Minority People Literature Award. A member of the Mosuo people, of the Naxi Nationality, Lamu has studied, recorded and translated Mosuo folklore, customs and religion since the 1980s. Lamu Gatusa has published numerous books of his collections and translations of Mosuo oral literature into Chinese poetic form, in order to reproduce Mosuo poetic aesthetic. In addition, Lamu has published scholarly articles in journals and anthologies and his most recent studies have focused on the impact of tourism and modernisation of Mosuo culture. Lamu has collaborated on the production of television programs and documentaries pertaining to Mosuo culture, and has mentored and advised many Chinese and Western scholars in the field of Mosuo studies.

5 The tree is the *axis mundi* that separates heaven and earth. As such it is also a symbol of kingship for the king too mediates between heaven and earth.

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# Discussion

**CHRISTINE MATHIEU, PhD**

**Matricultural resilience in historical context: a focus on the Naxi nationality**

In the Sino-Tibetan Marches, the number seven is a feminine number. Seven is associated with matrilines, mountain valleys, and rivers, and it is the agent of change. It seems a poetically appropriate coincidence that Volume 2, Issue 1, of *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* should contain seven contributions on the matricultures of East Asia. These seven contributions offer a multifaceted approach on matriculture, examining history, religion, economics, and intangible cultural modalities. If the approaches featured in this issue are diverse, so are the family systems. Sino-Tibetan kinship modes are diversified and flexible: polyandry, polygyny, monogamy, patrilocality, matrilocality, neolocality, patrilineality and matrilineality are all found in this region.

The kinship systems explored in the present collection, being specifically concerned with matricultural modes, tend to promote sibling relationships over individual conjugal ties: brothers and sisters were at the core of royal and commoner families in ancient Japan (Sato) as they are today in the marriage-less families of Zhaba and Yongning (Darragon, Milan, Mattison *et al*). The polyandrous households of Deqin are likewise centred on sibling relations (Previato), and the patrilineal Mosuo families of Labei confirm a brother's lifelong interest in his sister's welfare.

Yet, conjugal ties are not entirely absent from these social arrangements. Nor do conjugal ties cancel out matricultural ideals. Married women are their husbands' equals among the patrilineal Mosuo people of Labei, where they are *dabu* (household heads), just as are sisters among the matrilineal Mosuo people of Yongning (Mattison *et al*; Mathieu, 2003). According to Previato, marriage establishes women as household heads among Khamba polyandrous households (Previatio). In fact, conjugal ties also play a role in the continuity of the marriage-less Mosuo households, where a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law may be taken into the house to balance the gender ratio needed for labour or for biological reproduction (Milan). It is remarkable that among the Mosuo, kinship diversity should be notable for the geographical distribution of matrilineal and patrilineal families rather than for its impact on the moral economy of Mosuo society.

The matricultural ideals that imbue both matrilineal and patrilineal Mosuo families are especially salient when, as Milan writes, we set our sights beyond the household. From my own research

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experience, matricultural ideals are especially salient when we consider the role of ancestors in the Mosuo worldview. The Mosuo worship their ancestors: they offer them daily libations and invite them to all major rituals, and their traditional Daba religion is entirely focused on ancestor worship. In Daba religion, there are two types of souls: the souls of one's own ancestors and the souls of other people's ancestors. The former are benevolent (so long as the living offer the correct rituals and take care of them), the latter are dangerous and the cause of all calamities. Indeed, a living family is not a synchronic unit but a link between a long line of predecessors and future generations. Importantly, in the Mosuo worldview, both men and women are full members of their family lines and both female and male ancestors are worshipped. Milan reports that when a female sexual partner is brought into a matrilineal household, she continues to honour her own ancestors as well as honouring the ancestors of the house into which she has been adopted. Meanwhile, in Labei, when people marry, the core concern of the Daba ritual consists in ensuring that the bride's ancestors do not follow her into her husband's house because ancestors (also) belong to women. Mosuo ancestral lines have a persistent and unequivocal connection to women among both the matrilineal and the patrilineal families.[1]

The Sino-Tibetan borderland is characterised by socio-cultural flexibility. The diversity of kinship systems found in this region is matched by a diversity of ethnic people whose social and territorial claims depend on demographic strength rather than on exclusive boundaries. Thus, interspaced Naxi, Tibetan, Qiang, Yi, Lisu, Bai, and Pumi (Premi) villages and households are found within Tibetan, Naxi, Bai, and Pumi dominated territories. In these settings, kinship organisation is not always dependent on ethnic identification. The Naxi people who live among the Pumi nationality of Muli have polyandrous families, and the Pumi people who live in the Yongning basin among the Mosuo have marriage-less matrilineal families. In other words, Sino-Tibetan kinship organisation may be less a function of ethnicity than of geographic location.

Such diversity speaks for adaptability and pragmatism. The societies of the Sino-Tibetan borderland are founded in subsistence economies and in the physically demanding existence of a challenging environment. Kinship is flexible because life demands practical solutions to issues of social, economic, and biological reproduction, but social flexibility is also enabled by a particular worldview about fertility and prosperity and the roles of women and men. This worldview places high value on the life-giving powers of women because it does not dissociate economic prosperity from general well-being, human fertility from economic prosperity, and female fertility from female sexuality. Nor does it entirely dissociate the material from the spiritual or the biological from the social. It is a worldview, in other words, that values life in the communion of nature and culture, in large part, no doubt, because in this formidable and ever-present mountainous environment, nature commands uncircumventable respect.

Kinship, however, is also socially constructed. Dominant and antithetical kinship systems as existed until recently amongst the Mosuo and the Naxi are found in regions closest to the historical centres of political power because these kinship systems and the societies they once organised are also the product of a very long history. Located at the crossroad of Qiangic, Burmese, Yi, Tibetan, Mongol, and Chinese civilisations and empires, the people of the Sino-Tibetan borderland have

1 Christine Mathieu, 'The Moso *Daba* Religious Specialists', in *Naxi and Moso Ethnography: Kin, Rites, Pictographs*, eds. Michael Oppitz and Elisabeth Hsu (Zürich: Völkerkundemuseum, 1998), 209-34.

witnessed waves of invasions, conquest, and migrations. These have left impressions on social organisation. Perhaps nowhere is it more evident than in the history of the Naxi nationality, one of fifty-six officially identified nationalities (*minzu*) which make up the Chinese state, among whom the Han nationality accounts for 91% of the total state population.

History has shaped the social present and the collective memories of the Naxi Nationality [*Naxizu*], whose people dwell on opposite shores of the Jinshajiang river (*Gold Sands River*), as the Yangtze River is known in these parts. On the eastern shore, Na people self-identify as Mosuo and their territories are divided between Yongning in Yunnan province and Zuosuo in Sichuan. Yongning is also the name of the township and the ancient Mosuo capital. On the western shore of the Jinshajiang are the Naxi, with their capital at Lijiang. In the 1950s, at the onset of the People's Republic of China, the Naxi and the Mosuo dwelt in very distinct socio-cultural realms marked by antithetical kinship systems and gender relations. The Mosuo were then, as they are now, renowned for their customs of free love and their matrilineal families. By contrast, the Naxi were patrilineal and had earned a tragic reputation on account of their strict marriage rules and the inordinate number of young people who committed love suicide. Yet, both peoples had deep historical roots in common. For centuries, the ancestors of present-day Naxi and Mosuo were known to the Chinese under the common ethnonym of *Mo-so* and, in 1956, both communities were officially identified as a single Naxi nationality. These observations raise evident questions for social scientists, for if the Naxi and the Mosuo were once a single ethnic group, and if they are still classed today as a single nationality, how did their respective (pre-1949) kinship systems come to diverge so dramatically? A number of scholars, including Yang Fuquan in this issue, believe that Naxi society was in earlier times more akin to Mosuo society, and that the Naxi developed harsher forms of patriarchy under Confucian and Imperial pressure. According to the contribution of Mattison *et al* to this volume, however, matriculture was more than likely *not* a universal feature of Mosuo society over a thousand years ago. From the Naxi Dongba manuscripts –whose contents Chinese scholars date to the Tang period (618-907) – it is clear that proto-Naxi worldview was founded in a powerful binary principle and gender complementarity rather than in the matrilineal/matricultural ideals found in Mosuo society or the patrilineal/patriarchal ideals which were still extant in Lijiang in the twentieth century. Should we then presume that Mosuo and Naxi cultural outlooks were always divergent, very much as they are today, or should we entertain the possibility that the cultural history of northern Yunnan is both complex and diversified? The latter seems to be in order, for the historical record strongly suggests that matrilineality and matriculture came to northern Yunnan in the course of history, and that it once had a presence on the Lijiang side as well as on the Yongning side of the Jinshajiang.

Matriliny possibly has a very ancient history in northern Yunnan. In the fifth century CE, the region was invaded by Dianxi tribes under their leader Meng Cucu. While very little is known about Meng Cucu, the Dianxi were Qiang, amongst whom some tribes were noted in the Chinese records as people who 'know their mothers but not their fathers'. Chinese scholars generally understand the latter to infer matrilineality, as Darragon does in her article.[2] Indeed, there is also an historical link between the peoples of northern Yunnan and the Dong Nüguo, the matriarchal queendom of the

2 Joseph F. Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of South-West China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1947); *Naxizu Jian Shi* [Brief history of the Naxi Nationality] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1963); Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); see also Darragon's article in this issue.

Sui (581-601) and Tang (618-907) dynasties explored in Darragon's article. For the name of a queen of Nüguo, Ngue, appears in the genealogical records of the Lijiang feudal lords and more precisely, with the tenth century proto-Naxi chief La-tu *Ngue*-Jun.[3] However, to appreciate the significance which the name Ngue potentially holds for the history of matriculture amongst the Naxi and Mosuo, it is necessary to backtrack to the eighth century, to the first historic ancestor of the Naxi chiefs and the Nanzhao conquest of northern Yunnan, when the Naxi and the Mosuo's ancestors still dwelt under a common tribal polity on either side of the Yangtze River. [4]

**Patrilineality and marriage alliances among the elite clans of northern Yunnan in the Nanzhao period (713-902)**

Discussing the transformations of gender roles which were imposed on the Naxi people of Lijiang during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), Yang Fuquan notes that, in ancient times, Naxi ancestors carried the clan names of their mothers and wives. In fact, these ancient names are found in the Naxi Dongba religious manuscripts as well as in the genealogical records of the Lijiang rulers. These names were made up of four syllables identifying the Mother's clan name, Father's personal name, Wife's clan name, and Ego's personal name, in this order. This four-syllable naming system, however, did not identify a matrilineal system but rather a patriline and marriage alliances. In other words, the naming system reflects avuncular concerns. Evidently, avuncular kinship *per se* is neither an index nor a recipe for matriculture because it is compatible with both matriliny and patriliny, as well as with extreme patriarchal systems in which women pass from their fathers and brothers' tutelary control to that of their husbands. Nevertheless, as it is exemplified amongst contemporary Mosuo patrilineal people in Labei and among the Nuoso people of Liangshang (Yi nationality in Ninglang county and the immediate neighbours of the Mosuo), avuncular kinship in the Sino-Tibetan region is characterized by the high status of wife-givers, enduring brother-sister ties, and the high-status of women.

In the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, composed in 1516 by the Naxi headman Mu Gong, the four-syllable naming pattern is specifically attached to the ancestors recorded between 714 and 902 CE.[5] The names and the biographical notes Mu Gong provided in this record give a great deal of information with which one can recover the history of Naxi and Mosuo kinship.

3 See Mathieu 2003, 56-7 and 392-407.

4 The Nanzhao (Southern Kingdom) ruled present day Yunnan province and extended into present day Myanmar; its capital was at Dali. Nanzhao conquered Lijiang in 702 CE. Lijiang and Yongning passed between China, Tibet, and Nanzhao (later the Dali Kingdom) until the Mongol conquest brought the province that became Yunnan into the Chinese empire in the thirteenth century.

5 Mu Gong composed two Chronicles: the first in 1516 and the other in 1545. There are glaring discrepancies between them, as well as mythical stories mixed in with historical events, and strange generational gaps. J.F. Rock and the twentieth-century descendants of the Mu family who showed Rock these documents found much of their contents incomprehensible. In my doctoral research, I proposed that these genealogical chronicles make historical sense when they are read through the lenses of myth and symbolism because in these documents, history is sacralised. The reading I give in this discussion is based on Christine Mathieu, *Lost Kingdoms and Forgotten Tribes: Myths, Mystery and Mother-right in the history of the Naxi nationality and the Mosuo people of Southwest China*, PhD dissertation, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, 1997, and Mathieu 2003. See Rock 1947, and Mathieu 1997 and 2003.

Beginning in the fourteenth century, the rulers of Lijiang had the clan name Mu but tradition relates that their original ancestor was a member of the Yang clan. Mu Gong's genealogy confirms this with a first ancestor named Yang Gu[6] (also pronounced *Ye Gu* in Naxi), who is said to have arrived in Lijiang in 714 CE, which is to say, with the Nanzhao conquest of northern Yunnan. In this same genealogy, Yang Gu is himself preceded by six mythical ancestors, among whom figures Meng Cucu (the fifth-century leader of the Dianxi mentioned above); heading the list of these six mythical ancestors is none other than the founding ancestor of the Naxi people, the mythical hero Cosseilee'ee.

Cosseilee'ee, hero of the Naxi creation myth, survived the primordial flood and married the Celestial princess Ceiheibubami. The story of their marriage is recorded in Naxi Dongba religious manuscripts and is told during many rituals. In particular, the story of Cosseilee'ee and Ceiheibubami is told on the occasion of the Sacrifice to Heaven, which commemorates the Naxi's mythic ancestors and the marriage of Heaven and Earth. During Imperial times, the Sacrifice to Heaven was primarily concerned with renewing the Naxi pledge to their feudal lords and their feudal lords' pledge to the Chinese emperor, while during the twentieth century, it was also concerned with renewing the solidarity of Naxi patrilines.[7] By linking Yang Gu's origins to the hero of the flood, to the Sacrifice to Heaven, and to the foundation of the Naxi people, the sixteenth-century chief Mu Gong placed his own genealogy at the apex of sacred and cosmic time in the royal traditions of Tibet, Nanzhao, South, and East Asia,[8] for the primordial flood and the marriage of Heaven and Earth are emblems of kingship among Tibetans, Yunnanese, and South Asians.[9]

Yang Gu's descendants had four-syllable names, and they ruled over northern Yunnan from father to son, from the Nanzhao conquest of 714 to the fall of Nanzhao in 902 CE.[10] This four-syllable naming system, however, is itself a variation on the geneological patronymic linkage system of the Tibeto-Burman clans of Nanzhao. In the Nanzhao system, a man's name is made up of two syllables: his father's name and his own. The genealogies of Nanzhao elite families thus consisted of lists of father-son names.[11] The four-syllable names in Mu Gong's genealogy have at their core these same father-son links to which are added the names of the clans from which men took their wives. Yang Gu's successors were named:

Yang Gu
**La**-gu **Pu**-meng
**Pu**-meng **Pu**-wang
**Pu**-wang **La**-wang
**La**-wang **Xi**-nei
**Xi**-nei **Xi**-ge

6 Yang Gu is actually given as Yang-Yin Du-Gu, a cosmic pun on *Yin-Yang*, the intricacies of which are too complex to be explained in the current discussion. For details, see Mathieu 2003, 79-83.
7 See Mathieu 2003, 295.
8 See Mathieu 2003, Chapter II.
9 Jean Przyluski, 'La princesse à l'odeur de poisson et la Nagi dans les traditions de l'Asie Orientale', *Études Asiatiques* 2 (1925), 265-84.
10 See Rock 1947 and Mathieu 2003.
11 Lo Ch'ang-p'ei, 'The Genealogical patronymic linkage system of the Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8 (1945), 349-63; Paul Pelliot, 'Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde', *Bulletin de L'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, Tome IV (1904), 131-413; Mathieu 2003. 58 and 317.

**Xi**-ge **La**-tu
**La**-tu **Ngue**-jun

The important thing to note is that Yang Gu married a woman of the La clan as shown by his son's name: **La**-gu **Pu**-meng. La-gu Pu-meng for his part married a woman of the Pu clan, and so forth. The name patterns in this genealogical segment show that between the eighth century and the turn of the tenth, the Yang chiefs married women from three other clans, the La, Pu, and Xi, and that their marriages occurred on the basis of matrilateral alliances with the Pu and the Xi, and recurring alliances with the La, which is the clan into which his own great-grandfather married. In other words, the name patterns indicate a tribal system held together by four clans: the Yang, the La, the Pu and the Xi, in which the Yang and the La dominate.

Mu Gong's *Genealogical Chronicles* are steeped in symbolism and magical reckonings because myth and history run in parallel and entwine to confirm the Nanzhao conquest of Lijiang as a cosmic event. In the myth, in times before time, a great flood destroys the known world and extinguishes humanity. One man survives, Coseeilee'ee, who has the favour of the gods. But Coseeilee'ee is alone and lonely on the empty earth, and he is eager to re-start humanity. In desperation, he ascends to Heaven to seek a wife. The Celestial Ceiheibubami falls in love with him but her father Ze-**La** Apu (*Grandfather Ze-La*) is more than reluctant and devises a series of treacherous trials with the goal of killing the upstart. Thanks to Ceiheibubami's intelligence and magic, the helpless Cosseilee'ee manages to overcome all the hurdles, Ze-La finally relents, and the couple marry. They descend from Heaven to create humanity on Earth. After Cosseilee'ee has learned the rituals to propitiate his wife's Celestial ancestors, Ceiheibubami gives birth to three sons who become the ancestors of the Tibetan, the Naxi, and the Bai (Nanzhao people). Indeed, from the perspective of traditional Yunnanese culture, ancestors rather than biology grant descendants because genealogical descent is a societal rather than a biological arrangement.

The Nanzhao conquered Lijiang during the eighth century and destroyed the previous political order, but brutal war is not sufficient to confer territorial rights. In Yunnan, as common to ancient China and other places in the world, stabilization after conquest required treaties between the warring parties and, not least, the marriage of the conqueror to the widow or daughter of the defeated ruler.[12] The name patterns connected to the Nanzhao period in the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family* show that such a marriage took place between the Nanzhao conqueror and a daughter of the defeated Qiangxi, descendants of the fifth-century chief Meng Cucu.

Yang Gu married A-Yao, a woman of the La clan of Lijiang. The name La means *tiger* and is a symbol of divine kingship among the Qiang. It is also the name of Ze-La Apu, the Celestial Grandfather, and

12 When Cao Pi succeeded the Han emperor and established a new dynasty in China in 220 CE, he sacrificed to Heaven and married Han Xiandi's two daughters, just as Emperor Yao had married the daughters of Shun. Charles P. Fitzgerald, *A Short Cultural History of China* (London: Cresset, 1961), 258-9. Refer to the genealogy of the early Tibetan kings in Sarat Chandra Das, *Contributions on the Religion and History of Tibet* (New Delhi: Manjusri Publishing House, 1970), 28. In the same vein, Ren Guo, who was invested as king of Yunnan in the wake of the Han conquest, was the son of Asoka and of a celestial princess. The first king of Nanzhao, Xinuluo, married a defeated king's daughter and established the Meng She Kingdom. Yang Chen, *Nan-tchao ye-che. Histoire particulière de Nan-tchao*, trans. Camille Sainson (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1904), 29, 31,33.

father of the heavenly princess Ceiheibubami. In Mu Gong's official genealogy, Yang Gu is the seventh ancestor after the flood. He is the mediator between myth and history because with his marriage to the La 'princess' in historic times, he replayed the union of Cosseilee'ee and Coheibubami in mythic times, which is to say, the union of Heaven and Earth.

Yang Gu, the Nanzhao conqueror, had no ancestors among the defeated Qiang tribes of Lijiang, just as Cosseilee'ee, being the sole survivor of the flood, is a lonely orphan in the myth. And just as Cosseilee'ee must learn to sacrifice to his wife's Celestial ancestors before she may give birth to humanity, so the historical Yang Gu's union with La A-Yao transfers her La ancestors to his own Yang descendants and thus unites the past and the future. The transfer of the ancestors from the La to the Yang confirms the legitimacy of conquest, and makes good on the promise of a new line of rulers and a new 'humanity' in the Yang clan. The various tribes are now united and the brutality of the conquest has been erased.

The cosmic flood is a symbol of dynastic change. The number seven is the agent of change, and it is associated with matrilines. In the Naxi cosmogonic myth, the matriline of mythical seven ancestors belongs to the Celestial Ceiheibubami, daughter of the Celestial Ze-La Apu. In the history of Lijiang, the foundational matriline belonged to the daughter of the conquered La clan, who became the wife of the conqueror.[13] The Naxi creation story and the Mu *Chronicles* give cause to believe that thirteen centuries ago, Lijiang political organisation valued (elite) women's natal families as well as patrilines.

### *The matrilineal shift in the 11th century*

The name of the chief La-Tu Ngue-Jun appears in the genealogy of the Lijiang rulers (ca. 902 CE), where it introduces a brand new syllable and with this a brand new clan: the clan Ngue, whose name can be associated with the matriarchal Nüguo. The date 902 is significant because it identifies another landmark event in the history of Lijiang and heralds renewed territorial conflicts. In 902, the ruling clan of Nanzhao was overthrown, and almost four decades later, Duan Siping seized power and founded the Dali kingdom (937 CE). The sequence of events ran in this manner: after the fall of Nanzhao, the tribes of northern Yunnan failed to rally to the Dali kingdom, and sometime later, the Pu tribes recovered their land. Then, at some stage of the 10th century, the Mo-so conquered Lijiang by force and took the land from the Pu.[14]

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13 A lot more can be said about these genealogical and mythical reckonings, including connections to the Tibetan and Bon traditions, and so forth. Refer to Mathieu 2003, for details.

14 The Pu clan figures in the genealogy of Lijiang chiefs among the original clans of northern Yunnan conquered by Yang Gu (see above). Naxi Dongba manuscripts and Mosuo oral traditions associate the Pu with the ancestors of the present-day Pumi nationality; Naxi and Mosuo folk traditions relate that the Pu occupied Lijiang before them. Chinese scholars believe the Pumi to be descended from Qiang tribes. For more details, including information about the populations who preceded the Dianxi in this region, see translations of the *Dushi fangyu zhi yao* [Minutes of the 21st history and FangYu] compiled between 1659 and 1692; the *Ming Histories*, and the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, among others, in Rock 1947; Édouard Chavannes, 'Documents Historiques Et Géographiques Relatifs a Li-Kiang', *T'oung Pao*, 13:4 (1912), 565–653; Guo Dalie, 'Naxizu Shi Liao Biannian' [Annalistic Records of the Naxi Nationality], in *Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, Vol. 2 (Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1986); *Pumizu Jian Shi* [Brief History of the Pumi Nationality] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe. 1988); and Mathieu 2003, Chapter IX.

The chieftain La-Tu Ngue-Jun is associated with these latter events and, according to the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, with the onset of a long period of political stability which lasted through most of the Song dynasty (960-1279), up until the Mongol conquest of 1253 CE. While Mu Gong does not provide much more information than this, the names of the ancestors he has recorded between 960 and 1253 tell an important story.

Like the names of his Yang predecessors, La-Tu Ngue-Jun's name was composed of his mother's clan name (La), his father's personal name (Tu), his wife's clan name (Ngue), and his own personal name (Jun). The Mo-so conquest of northern Yunnan, like the Nanzhao conquest of the eighth century, is thus marked in the *Genealogical Chronicles* by a marriage between the conqueror and the La clan. But this is not all. According to Mu Gong, La-Tu Ngue-Jun's descendant Ngue-Jun Mou-Ju founded a brand new dynasty called the Mo-so Zhao (*Mo-so Kingdom*) and heralded a new name pattern. Ngue-Jun Mou-Ju's descendants were named:

**Mou**-Ju **Mou**-xi
**Mou**-xi **Mou**-cuo
**Mou**-cuo **Mou**-luo
**Mou**-luo **Mou**-bao[15]

The name pattern **Mou**-*x* **Mou**-*y* implies that the wives and mothers of Ngue-Jun's descendants belonged to the same clan Mou. Now, keeping in mind that the name Mou is more than likely a transliteration of *Mee* (also *Meng*, *Mai*, *Mi*, *Mu*, *Mo*, *Ma*), meaning Heaven, and therefore an honorific title marking the Celestial status of the tribal chieftains, it is also reasonable to infer that the Mou did in fact succeed each other in a matriline.

There are other indices. To begin with, there are the matrilineal families of contemporary Yongning. Then, there is the name *Ngue*, which potentially ties the Mou to the Nüguo. There is also the name Mo-so, which Chinese scholars believe to have first appeared in the third-century *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, where it is given as Mo-sa and Mo-sha.[16] I heard the name Mo-so (Mosuo) pronounced in this manner in Yunnan in the 1990s. While the suffixes */so/*, */sa/* or */sha/* have no meaning in Chinese, they indicate descent in the mother or the wife's line in Tibetan.[17] Finally, there is the Mosuo creation myth. Mosuo cosmogony shares many elements with the Naxi Dongba creation myth (and other regional myths), with the significant difference that where Naxi myth establishes the origins of the Naxi patrilines, the Mosuo creation myth is a matrilineal and a matriarchal charter.

The Mosuo are descended from Mumigugumi and Mumijiajiami: two Celestial sisters who are daughters of the Celestial Mother, for there is no Mosuo equivalent to Ze-La Apu, the Celestial father of Naxi cosmogeny. On the other hand, like the Naxi Celestial Ceiheibubami, the Celestial Mumigugumi falls in love with Codeiliusso, a man who survives the flood (like his Naxi counterpart). But whereas the disgruntled Ze-La Apu eventually relents and allows the Naxi hero to

15 Rock 1947, 160; Mathieu 2003, 78.
16 *Naxizu Jian Shi*, 16.
17 Rolf A. Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches tibétaines* (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1959), 49n137; Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 3 vols (Rome: Liberia dello Stato, 1949), 679n7.

marry his Celestial daughter, the Mosuo's Celestial Mother plays a dirty trick on Codeiliusso by engineering his marriage to his beloved's sister, Mumijiajiami. When the couple returns to Earth, Mumugugumi is furious with jealous rage. She changes herself into a male monkey and follows them. She then lures Codeiliusso deep into the forest, feeds him delicacies that send him into an enchanted sleep, and goes off to seduce her sister Mumijiajiami. From their union, two little half-monkeys, a brother and a sister, are born. Satisfied with her work, Mumigugumi returns to Heaven and Codeiliusso wakes up. He returns to his house where he finds his wife and the half-monkeys. Realising that he is too old to father humanity, he takes pity on the little creatures. He places a cauldron of water to boil over a fire. He pours the scalding water over the children, removing most of their body hair, and humanising them. The Mosuo people are descended from this brother and sister.[18]

Thus, the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family*, oral lore, and mythology corroborate the proposition that matrilineality has historical depth in northern Yunnan. And it is certainly of great interest that the DNA data studies cited by Mattison *et al* lend support to the proposition that there was a shift *to* matrilineality in Yongning about a thousand years ago, for the latter corresponds to the Mou dynasty, and the foundation of the Mo-so Zhao - as given by Mu Gong in the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family.*[19]

***The patrilineal shift in thirteenth-century Lijian****g*

In 1253 CE, the Mongols invaded northern Yunnan. The syllable Mou then disappeared from the genealogy of Lijiang chiefs, replaced by the syllable Ah. The first chief to carry this new name is Mou-Bao Ah-Cong. After him, all the descendants up until the Ming conquest of Yunnan in 1381 CE will carry this name. From Mou-ba Ah-cong, they are:

> **Ah**-cong **Ah**-liang
> **Ah**-liang **Ah**-hu
> **Ah**-hu **Ah**-lie
> **Ah**-lie **Ah**-jia
> **Ah**-jia **Ah**-de [who will take the family name Mu and become Mu De in 1381, at the time of the Ming conquest of Yunnan]

The double syllable *Ah* appears with the Mongol invasion; it no doubt belonged to the Mongols, and, in particular, to the Mongol chief who married into the defeated Mou clan. In a second version of his *Genealogical Chronicles*, written in 1545, Mu Gong actually confirmed that his Mongol ancestor Ah-Cong was adopted by the local chief Nian-Luo Nian-Bao (who is Mou-Lou

18 See the complete English translation of the myth collected by Lamu Gatusa in Mathieu 2003, 427-59.
19 Please note that a minor correction occurred in this sentence on 24 February 2022. The original read as follows: "... DNA data studies pursued by Mattison *et al* show a shift *to* matrilineality...".

Mou-Bao in the 1516 Chronicle).[20] This story has not been forgotten, and both the Naxi and the Mosuo say that their feudal lords were descended from one of Kublai Khan's officers.

There is no doubt that the syllable Ah is a patronym. In the Mou successions, as in the earlier Nanzhao successions, Mu Gong provided only the personal names of wives, and not their clan names since these appear in their husbands' names. From the Mongol period onwards, however, Mu Gong indicates the names of wives' fathers as well as the wives' personal names.[21]

***At the close of the 14th century, Lijiang and Yongning followed their own destinies***

In 1381, the chieftain Ah-Jia Ah-De joined the Ming armies against the Mongols and thus secured his position as well as hereditary rule for his descendants. In gratitude and to show his devotion, Ah-Jia Ah-De requested the Chinese name Mu from the emperor.[22] Ah-Jia Ah-De became Mu De and all his descendants were called Mu. In actual fact, the name Mu (木, meaning *tree*) is not a Chinese surname, but it functions as a Chinese patronym on two counts: it consists of a single syllable placed before the personal name, and it is inherited patrilineally. However, Mu is also a Chinese transliteration of the Naxi *mee* (meaning *heaven* and *celestial)*, and of the Naxi sacred *mei* tree, a Naxi *axis mundi* between Heaven and Earth. Not least, the name Mu is also a Chinese rendition of the former name Mou attached to the matrilineal Mo-so Zhao of Mu Gong's first Chronicle, whilst the names Mu, *mee*, *mei* are also associated with Bon and Tibetan royal symbolism.[23]

In 1381 CE, the Hongwu Emperor rewarded Mu De' s loyalty with this new patronym and confirmed his descendants' rule over the tribes of northern Yunnan. However, the emperor also reduced Mu De's territories, by dividing them with the Yangtze. The region of Lijiang was from that time forward placed under the hereditary rule of the Mu clan and the region of Yongning under that of the Ah chiefs (Mu relatives). From this time on, once-unified Naxi ancestors became two distinct peoples, today identified as Naxi and Mosuo, who followed their own political and social destinies.

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20 Note that I have simplified the discussion for the present text, because the story surrounding Ah Cong and the Mongols is particularly convoluted. Conscious of pleasing the Ming authorities, Mu Gong omitted all the ancestors before the Mongol invasion, but he also distanced his family's origins from the Mongol conquest. In this new document, the legendary first ancestor is a Mongol called Yeye, who arrived in Lijiang in the twelfth century–a hundred years prior to the Mongol conquest, which is to say, during the period associated with the Mou in the first chronicle. Mu Gong writes that Yeye was a holy man who was carried to Lijiang on torrents of water arising from the Jinshajiang and that Yeye's first named descendant Ah Cong married into the Mou family (now renamed Nian). The name Yeye simply means grandfather (or ancestor), while in Naxi Ye is also *yang*. Yeye's story recalls the Yang clan, flood mythology, the symbolism pertaining to dynastic change, the Mo-so Zhao, and Kublai Khan's conquest of Lijiang in 1253. With Yeye, Mu Gong encrypted the first part of the genealogy he compiled in 1516 (from Nanzhao to the Mongols), while omitting the historical details in their entirety. I will return to this second chronicle as well as to Nian-Luo Nian-Bao further in this discussion. For the details of the two *Genealogical Chronicles*, see Mathieu 2003, Chapter II.

21 Mathieu 2003, 88-9.

22 Note that this is the official version as provided in the Mu genealogies. See Rock 1947.

23 Mathieu 2003, 110-4.

***Marriage and mother-right, and the feudalisation of the Sino-Tibetan borderland***

The Yuan and Ming emperors governed the Sino-Tibetan borderlands by indirect rule. As discussed by Darragon and Yang Fuquan, these Chinese emperors showed little, if any, interest in Sinicizing the people on the margins of their empire at that time. However, the emperors were interested in maintaining the rituals of vassalage, in keeping the peace on their frontiers, and in receiving tribute – and from the perspective of the tribal chieftains whose hereditary rule was entirely dependent on Imperial goodwill, satisfying these Imperial wishes demanded local action.

Native chieftains of northern Yunnan had to impose their governance over the clans under their jurisdiction because, until the fourteenth century, tribal societies were still relatively anarchistic groups held together through both matrilateral and reciprocal marriage alliances and prescriptive marriage taboos. They were also caste societies. Nanzhao clans were organised as higher Black and lower White castes. The Mongols, meanwhile, were organised as superior White and lower Black castes.[24] Dongba religious manuscripts make explicit that, in some distant past, Naxi society was also organised into castes which were ranked in the following order of prestige: Per, Na, Boa and Wu (White, Black, Pumi and slaves).

The tribal societies of the Sino-Tibetan frontier were prone to violence. Blood feuds were frequent and arose as a result of arguments over theft, murder, insults, and women. Inter-clan warfare was enabled by a system of marriage alliances that nurtured avuncular concerns alongside the high status of wife-givers and of women. In the first instance, marriage alliances had the potential of forging tribal federations and with this to form alliances that challenged the political *status-quo*. But just as importantly, marriage alliances fostered volatile relationships between in-laws, as fathers, uncles and brothers did not hesitate to take up arms in defence of their daughters, nieces and sisters.[25] To counter blood feuds and to consolidate their political powers, the hereditary rulers of Lijiang and Yongning reformed the tribal polities on both sides of the Yangtze River from tribal and caste societies to class societies. Chinese historians have established that by the mid-sixteenth century, Lijiang was organised as a three-tiered feudal domain composed of aristocratic families, commoners, and serfs.[26] The Ah of Yongning likewise ruled over a three-tiered feudal domain which was only abolished in 1956 and is well remembered by contemporary Mosuo.[27]

During the Ming dynasty (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), the Mu chiefs of Lijiang expanded their dominion over neighbouring hill tribes and into Tibetan country. They opened their realm to Han immigration (farmers and soldiers), and extended their cultural and civilizational interests. They constructed Taoist, Chinese Buddhist, Tibetan Karmapa, and Nyngmapa Buddhist temples. They wrote poetry and espoused Confucian values (at least officially). In Tibetan territories, they

24 The Nuosu (today's Yi minority nationality) were still organised on this caste system up to 1956. The Nuosu are said to be descended from the Wuman tribes of Nanzhao. They are the Mosuo's immediate neighbours and the dominant ethnic group of Ninglang County.

25 Alain Y. Dessaint, *Minorities of South-West China* (New Haven: Human Research Area Files Press, 1980), 31. The Naxi king Mu Gong was himself embroiled in such fighting with his own in-laws, the Feng family, in 1528. Rock 1947, 115-6. See also Mathieu 2003, 323-7.

26 Guo Dalie and He Zhiwu, personal communication, Kunming, 1991. Also, *Naxizu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, Vol. 2, 52.

27 See Rock 1947 for first-hand accounts of feudal Yongning and other feudal domains of the Sino-Tibetan borderland prior to the Communist revolution.

sponsored both Karmapa and Gelugpa temples.[28] At the turn of the seventeenth century, on the eve of the Manchu conquest of China, the Mu governed over a sizable kingdom and diverse people among whom they had established garrisoned towns, and from whom they collected tribute. According to Chinese historians, Lijiang was not only a feudal domain, it was also a militarist organization where, as the traditional Naxi proverb puts it, 'when the peasants are together they are soldiers, when they are dispersed, they are commoners.'[29] It is very likely that this military experience had consequences for gender definitions, and that among the Naxi as among the ancient Mongols, conquest turned men into warriors and women into civilian men.[30]

In contrast to their Lijiang cousins, the Yongning feudal lords appear to have opted for territorial contraction. Mosuo leaders came under the growing influence of the Gelugpa church and eventually converted to Buddhism. Due this process, they lost part of their territories, when, in 1700, the La clan of Zuosuo refused to convert and seceded from Yongning with Imperial blessing. In addition, in an attempt to make their realm less attractive to Han immigrants as well as to the fiercely independent Nuoso, Yongning feudal lords reduced the economic potential of their domain by forbidding their subjects from growing rice.[31] The strategy had its rewards: Yongning chiefs were not always able to defend against raiding from the Nuosu, but they maintained stable relations with both the Chinese interior and neighbouring Tibet. As mentioned above, they also retained their hereditary rule until the mid-twentieth century, when the Communist regime abolished the feudal system.[32]

The reorganisation of both Lijiang and Yongning from tribal/caste to class societies necessitated structural changes and, therefore, transformations of the kinship systems. Given what is known of the history of conquest and migration, it is likely that matriliny was not a universal kinship system in Lijiang or Yongning at the close of the fourteenth century. However, taking into consideration the region's ancient connections to the Nüguo and the DNA studies by Mattison *et al.*, there is little reason to doubt that matriliny had a significant presence in Lijiang and Yongning before the feudalization of Naxi and Mosuo societies during the Ming period. The feudal lords of Yongning evidently found political advantage in the matrilineal family system because they actively promoted the marriage-less family, not only among the Mosuo clans but also among the Pumi people living in Yongning, through taxation, ritual, and mythical-moral edicts about the indivisible family and harmonious relations, as exemplified in the proverbs recorded by Lamu Gatusa and reproduced in this issue. To maintain the legitimacy of their own rule, however, the chieftains themselves married.

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28 Karl Debreczeny, 'Dabaojigong and the Regional Tradition of Ming Sino-Tibetan Painting in the Kingdom of Lijiang', in *Buddhism between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009).

29 *Naxizu Jian Shi*, 31.

30 In the code of law of Genghis Khan, it is decreed that women were to do men's work whilst men were at the front. Valentin A. Riazanovskii, *Customary Law of the Mongol Tribes (Mongols, Buriats, Kalmucks)* (Kharbin: Art Printing House, 1929), 58.

31 For more details, see *Naxizu jian shi* and Rock 1947.

32 The caste and slave system of neighbouring Nuosu was abolished in that same year. See Alan Winnington, *The Slaves of the Cool Mountains* (Berlin: Seven Seas Publishers, 1962), for a first-hand account of the reforms and a remarkable example of applied anthropology.

In Lijiang, on the other hand, elite clans and the families who lived closest to the centres of administrative powers came under a politically restrictive system of marriage alliances governed by patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription. In former publications, I pointed to evidence of this marriage prescription in the successions of the Mu chiefs of the Ming and Qing periods (sixteenth-eighteenth centuries) as well as in Naxi Dongba mythology. I posited that the shift from bilateral marriage alliances to patrilateral cross-cousin marriage would have broken the rules of caste endogamy, allowing marriage alliances between White and Black clans, and with this, restructuring the tribal caste system into the feudal class system.[33] However, another structural consequence (or a side-effect?) of this marriage prescription is that patrilateral cross-cousin marriage resulted in a parallel descent system that effectively excluded Naxi women from Naxi patrilines. Among the Naxi, as the proverb goes, 'bone begets bone and flesh begets flesh' (bone is the enduring ancestral principle, flesh belongs to the mortal body). In Naxi Dongba religious texts dedicated to the Sacrifice to Heaven, it is written:

> As the father walks so the son follows in his footsteps, as the mother walks in the old valley, so does the daughter, so that the custom may not be lost. As the grand-father sacrificed to Heaven, so does the grand-child; as the father sacrificed to Heaven, so does the son. The grandfather teaches the grand-child, and the father the son. It is not the custom for a woman to climb up to the roof of the house.[34]

With this final sentence, the logic of kinship enters the ritual sphere. Naxi and Mosuo houses are representations of the universe, and the roof of the house is a cosmic space: it is between earth and heaven, between people and their ancestors. Naxi tradition forbade women from climbing on the roof of the house because they were excluded from the rituals associated with ancestral cults, including the rituals of the Sacrifice to Heaven. The latter exclusion was all the more salient given that it is during the Sacrifice to Heaven that Naxi sacrifice to their original matriline, to the Celestial father and mother of the Celestial woman who married the earthly man, and from whom the Naxi are descended. In fact, Naxi women were not only excluded from climbing onto the roof, they were ritually confined to the lower levels of the house. Thus, the position of Naxi women in pre-Revolution Lijiang (and beyond) was in sharp contrast to that of Mosuo women who, in their own homes, sit at the high hearth in the place of honour, whether they are heading matrilineal or patrilineal households. It was also in sharp contrast with the position of women in other Sino-Tibetan regions, although there are a few striking similarities between Qiang and Naxi women: both are preferably older than their husbands and both suffer from degrees of ritual defilement that proscribe them from ritual activities (Darragon).

The Naxi feudal system was abolished in 1723 by the Qing emperor; Naxi feudal lords were removed from office and replaced by Imperial administrators, who, as Yang Fuquan describes, instituted Chinese marriage rituals and marriage rules and strict requirements of patrilineal successions upon the Naxi. Chinese marriage rules, however, did not cancel out the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription. This Naxi marriage custom, which was initiated among the elite families of Ming dynasty Lijiang, was still in place among Naxi commoners at the establishment of

33 Mathieu 2003, Chapter VII.
34 Joseph F. Rock, ‘The Muan-pbo Ceremony or the Sacrifice to Heaven as Practiced by the Na-khi’, *Monumenta Serica* 13 (1948), 88.

the People's Republic of China in 1949. Indeed, aspects of the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage system were not entirely incompatible with Confucian patrilineal ideals.

### *Mother-right in Lijiang and Yongning during the Qing dynasty and the Republics (1912-1949 and 1949 onwards)*

From 1723 onwards, the Qing administrators of Lijiang issued several decrees in an attempt to Confucianize Naxi society: the Naxi were expected to adopt Chinese dress, burial, and marriage rites and taboos (Yang). These reforms signalled great cultural change for they were designed to foster, not only Confucianisation but assimilation through inter-marriage between Naxi women and Han immigrants. This Qing policy was strongly resented as well as resisted by the Naxi. [35] There is little reason to underestimate not only the connections between these events and the Naxi love suicide custom as discussed by Yang Fuquan, but also the connections between love suicide and traditional Naxi marriage arrangements. For the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription would have played a significant role in regulating Naxi-Han intermarriages insofar as it guaranteed the reciprocal exchange of daughters between indigenous Naxi families as well as between native Naxi and assimilated Naxi families descended from Han migrants.[36]

Love suicide had Naxi cultural roots, for it was mandated as well as sanctioned by the Naxi Dongba religion. More than likely, the behaviour also had deep historical roots, for it was not unknown among the neighbouring Nuosu, with whom the Naxi shared a number of customs, aspects of language, and a common past in the Nanzhao kingdom. Prior to the abolishment of the caste system in 1956, the Nuosu had a flexible approach to female pre-marital chastity but they strictly forbade female hypogamy and suicide was a mandatory sentence for lovers who broke the rules of caste endogamy.[37] Seen from this perspective, love suicide amongst the Naxi can be understood not only as an act of despair and resistance, but also as a juridical boundary, for suicide was a death sentence. Indeed, if illicit lovers had been allowed to break betrothal promises, they would not have committed suicide, but if illicit lovers had been allowed to break betrothal premises, the Naxi would not have been under the edict of a patrilateral cross-cousin marriage prescription.

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35 In personal communication (1991), Naxi scholars Guo Dalie, and the late He Zhiwu explained to me that the Naxi were fiercely opposed to Han inter-marriage. This is confirmed by eye-witness Peter Goullart in *Forgotten Kingdom* (London: John Murray, 1957), 173-4. Interestingly, Chavannes notes that the Mu overlords themselves always married Indigenous women. Édouard Chavannes, 'Documents historiques et géographiques relatifs à Li-kiang' in Jacques Bacot and Édouard Chavannes, *Les Mo-so. Ethnographie des Mo-so, leurs religions, leur langue et leur écriture* (Leiden: Brill, 1913), 127-140, p. 120

36 Assimilated people (people who married into the Naxi) belonged to their own faction for the Sacrifice to Heaven ritual (*Shai*). See Charles McKhann, *Fleshing Out the Bones: kiinship and cosmology in the Maqxi religion*, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, United States, 1992, for the details of this ritual in contemporary times.

37 See Vicomte Henri M.G. D'Ollone, *In Forbidden China: The D'Ollone Mission (1906-1909)* (London: Fisher and Unwin, 1912), 62; Lin Yueh-hua, *The Lolo of Liangshan* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1947), 70; Song Enchang, 'Xiao Liangshan Yizu Hunyin He Xisu Diaocha' [Research into the customs and marriages of the Yi nationality of Xiao Liangshan], in *Yunnan Minzu Minsu He Zongjiao Diaocha* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), 21; and Samuel Pollard, *In Unknown China. A record of the observations, adventures and experiences of a pioneer missionary during a prolonged sojourn amongst the wild and unknown Nosu tribe of western China* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1921), 187.

This said, strict marriage arrangements alone cannot explain the fact that love suicide among the Naxi was not only an alarming social problem, but as Yang Fuquan writes, a cultural phenomenon, a unique Naxi custom, imbued with - as well as driven by - shame and romantic yearning. Strict betrothal arrangements and the patrilateral cross-cousin prescription would not have provoked such alarming rates of suicide if Naxi society had had the means of accommodating illegitimate children, as did other communities of the Sino-Tibetan borderland. However, as explained by Peter Goullart, who worked and lived in Lijiang for ten years prior to the Communist revolution, the dynamic operated as follows: amongst the Naxi, "… a bastard was a disgrace of unparalleled proportions. The girl would be killed by her parents anyway, and the only escape was suicide in which her lover was honour bound to join."[38] There were many social and cultural layers that enabled this tragic custom, however, as indicated by Yang Fuquan, the immediate cause of suicide was unwed pregnancy. There was no place in Lijiang society for children born outside of the legitimate marriage arrangements, and, therefore, no place for their mothers.[39]

From this perspective, the forced adoption of Confucian values provides the best explanation for the tragic Naxi custom, as Yang argues. However, these Confucian values never reached Naxi families who dwelt in the more remote mountainous regions beyond the centres of administrative and political power, such as, for example, the people of Fengke, who live directly opposite Mosuo territories on the western shore of the Yangtze River. Like the Naxi of the Lijiang plain, Fengke Naxi were (are) patrilineal. In Fengke, women and wives' families had low ritual status, and were ritually confined to the lower levels of the house. However, post-1723, Fengke women continued to wear their traditional skirts and they did not commit love suicide. In Fengke, the Naxi did not adopt ideas of female chastity before or after marriage. Thus women and men conducted visiting relationships (as they still do today and as women and men in Yongning and in Zhaba also do). And unlike what happened in Lijiang, in Fengke, children who were born out of free love relationships could either accompany their mothers to their husbands' families whether their husbands were or were not the children's fathers. Children could also remain with their mothers' natal families.

None of the Naxi's ethnic neighbours and none of the Naxi who live in the more remote regions of Lijiang placed undue value on female monogamy, female chastity, or the legitimacy of children (Yang, Darragon). From the Confucian perspective, however, female chastity and the regulation of female pollution were paramount virtues because they were entirely entwined with strictly exclusive ideas of paternal legitimacy. These notions were grafted onto the cultural fabric of Lijiang with disastrous consequences for women and for Naxi matriculture.

### *Religion and gender transformations in the Sino-Tibetan borderland*

This historical overview, broad and scant as it must be, would be incomplete if it were to ignore the possible role of religion in the transformation of gender in the cultures of northern Yunnan. Religion, like kinship and ethnicity, is here diverse, layered, and complex. Up until the seventeenth century, Bon seems to have held a significant place among the peoples of Lijiang and Yongning: the

38 Goullart, 154.
39 Joseph F. Rock, 'The Romance of Ka-ma-gyu-mi-gkyi', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 39 (1939), Hanoi.

local historical record maintains that prior to their conversion to Buddhism, the people of northern Yunnan and southern Sichuan practiced 'the Black Bon', and the Mu's own claims to sacred kingship were steeped in Bon symbolism.[40] However, it is unlikely that Bon held an exclusive position among the tribes of northern Yunnan prior to the Buddhist conversion of elite families. Indian and Chinese Buddhism, along with Taoism and a local shamanic tradition, all had the favour of Nanzhao, and the Mongols also practised their own shamanism. The first Chinese Buddhist temple was constructed in Lijiang during the Yuan period (1279-1368) and, during the Ming period, Naxi leaders founded Taoist, Chinese Buddhist, and Tibetan Buddhist temples. In the sixteenth century, Tibetan Buddhists of both Red and Yellow Hats were also active in Yongning.[41]

In the seventeenth century, religious conflicts between Bonpos, Karmapa Buddhists, and Gelugpa Buddhists (the latter under allied Tibetan and Mongol military power) engulfed the Sino-Tibetan borderland. The Lijiang chief Mu Zeng converted to Karmapa in 1600 and waged what is still remembered today as a cruel war against the Gelugpa converts in his outlying Muli territories.[42] In 1700, the Yongning chief officially converted to Gelugpa along with all his subjects.[43] With this, the people of Lijiang and Yongning were now in opposing religious camps. When, two decades later (in 1723), Lijiang was annexed into the Imperial administration, the Naxi retained their religious eclecticism – although Gelugpa, the church of the Tibetan theocracy and of the Yongning Mosuo, never gained a presence in Lijiang.

Meanwhile, Bon virtually disappeared from the region except in Zuosuo in Sichuan (in which a unique Bon temple may still be found today), where the above-mentioned La clan refused to convert to Buddhism and seceded from Yongning with Imperial approval. Indigenised Bon elements also survived in the religious traditions of the Naxi Dongba and Mosuo Daba religions, but even these smaller traditions were not left untouched, for both have evidently undergone substantial gender transformations. From the Dongba manuscripts and Daba oral literature, we learn that, in a past distant enough to have left no trace in real life but not so distant as to have been entirely forgotten, Naxi and Mosuo rituals were conducted by a female and male pair of religious specialists: the *Pa* and *Pu*, respectively. Such female-male ritual pairs were not unique to the Naxi and the Mosuo: they are a central feature of Mongolian shamanism[44] and of the Nuosu Bimo religious tradition. In the Dongba manuscripts, the female *Pa* is described as the 'intelligent one' (the diviner who sees the ghosts) and the male *Pu* as 'the capable one' (who chants the liturgy).

When and how the female-male ritual specialists of Lijiang and Yongning made way for single male priests is not known. Still, we can postulate that in both Yongning and Lijiang, this change is linked to the conversion of the ruling elites to Tibetan Buddhism and the final departure of Bon from this

40 For Dongba art and iconography, see Christine Mathieu, 'The Bon in Naxi History', in *Asian Horizons: Giuseppe Tucci's Buddhist, Indian, Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, eds. Andrea Di Castsro and David Templeman (Melbourne: Monash University and Rome: IIAO, 2015) and Christine Mathieu, 'The Dongba Religion', in *Quentin Roosevelt's China: Ancestral Realms of the Naxi*, eds. Christine Mathieu and Cindy Ho (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers and New York: Rubin Museum of Arts, 2011).
41 *Naxizu Jian Shi*; Rock 1947; Debreczeny.
42 See Koen Wellens, *Consecrating the Premi House: Ritual, Community and the State in the Borderlands of East Tibet,* PhD Dissertation, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, Norway, and Rock 1947.
43 Rock 1947, 56.
44 Walther Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia (*London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 6-9.

region. It is true that the Mosuo chieftains of Yongning had to conform to the patrilineal expectations of the Qing administration in order to maintain the legitimacy of their successions, but as Yang Fuquan points out, the policies of assimilation were not applied to the people on the eastern shores of the Jinshajiang. Yongning remained under indirect rule and Confucianism did not become a part of the cultural landscape in the matrilineal Mosuo society. Yet, even among the matrilineal Mosuo, there are no female ritual specialists but only male Daba priests.

Yongning and Lijiang have this in common: the ruling clans on both sides of the Jianshajiang were influenced by sects of Tibetan Buddhism which did not favour gender parity. According to the Tibetan Buddhist historical tradition, King Songtsen Gampo requested of his converted Buddhist subjects 'not to listen to the words of women'.[45] Placed among the sixteen primary moral virtues, it is reasonable to assume that this injunction extended to female diviners. In 1700, in the wake of religious conflict that had raged on his frontiers, the Yongning overlord and all of his subjects officially converted to Gelugpa Buddhism. By 1700, Tibetan Buddhism had enjoyed a long presence in Yongning, for Chinese scholars date the construction of the Gelugpa Zhamie temple of Yongning to 1556.[46] This is also the period when, according to the Daba genealogy of the Yongning chiefs, mid-sixteenth-century Mosuo chiefs discarded their traditional names and adopted Tibetan names.[47] It may well be that Buddhist influence affected gender relations in Yongning before 1700 and the official conversion of the Mosuo chieftain. As we saw above, in 1700 the La clan seceded from Yongning and retained Bon faith and practice in Zuosuo. However, according to Lamu Gatusa, in Zuosuo, the Daba religion is identical to what it is in Yongning, and there are no female diviners in Zuosuo.[48]

Wherever the Dongba religion is found in northern Yunnan, there are only single male priests and no gender-paired ritual specialists – even in places that were governed by Lijiang before its integration into the Qing administration. Naxi leader Mu Zeng converted to Karmapa Buddhism in 1600, and Chinese scholars date the construction of the first Karmapa temple in Lijiang to 1627 CE. Seen in this light, it seems reasonable to speculate that the transformation of gender roles in the Naxi Dongba religion was connected to the increasing influence of Buddhism in the Lijiang basin, and was very possibly initiated before the reforms of 1723 and the Confucianisation of the Naxi. But then again, historical events are complex: Lijiang remained religiously eclectic and Tibetan Buddhism never gained the same degree of influence among the Naxi as it did among the Mosuo. Although Karmapa Buddhists enjoyed the ongoing support of Qing emperors - the latter sponsoring the construction of several temples among the Naxi after the administrative reforms of 1723 - by the twentieth century, Tibetan Buddhist influence in Lijiang was negligible.

Furthermore, a Dongba ritual practice suggests that full transformation from a female-male ritual pair to the single male priest was only accomplished in the Lijiang basin during the course of the

45 Shih-Yü Yü Li, 'Tibetan Folk-Law', in *Folk Law: Essays in the Theory of Lex Non Scripta*, eds. Alison Dundes Renteln and Alan Dundes (New York and London: Garland, 1994), 514; Das, 33.
46 Shih Chuan-kang, *The Yongning Moso: Sexual Union, Household Organization, Ethnicity and Gender in a Matrilineal Duolocal Society in Southwest China*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Stanford University, United States, 1993, 181 (on file with University Microfilms International).
47 Mathieu 2003, 396-405. Note that alongside this Daba genealogy, Ah chiefs also kept official genealogical records, as required by the Imperial administration.
48 Personal communication, Kunming, 2011.

eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. When Dongbas conduct a ritual, priests always recite the genealogies of teachers who preceded them, all the way back to the establishing founder of the ritual that every Dongba after him attempts to reproduce. According to He Pingzheng and Li Jingsheng of the Dongba Research Institute, the longer genealogies of the 1990s included fifteen teacher-ancestors, but He and Li knew of a genealogy with twenty-five teacher-ancestors.[49] These genealogies suggest that the institution of single male priests may have originated during the sixteenth century and that it expanded over the course of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In other words, where Buddhism may have initiated a reform of the gendered ritual system amongst converts of the Sino-Tibetan borderland, Confucianism likely played a role in transforming the Naxi religious system. As relayed by Yang Fuquan, Qing administrators not only promoted notions of female chastity and extreme notions about the polluting powers of women, they proscribed Naxi women from temple worship. It is possible that by discouraging the participation of women from organised religion, the Confucian administrators fostered their exclusion from all ritual activities.

The degree of ritual defilement suffered by Naxi women prior to the Revolution was so extreme as to be virtually unique among the people of the Sino-Tibetan borderland. Among neighbouring people, women's marginalisation from Buddhism did not exclude them from *all* religious activities. As Previato writes, in polyandrous Deqin, women are marginal players in Tibetan Buddhist practicte, but they play crucial roles in the rituals dedicated to the *klu* spirits of nature and mountain worship. Among the Mosuo, Buddhism is likewise male dominated, but Mosuo women are in charge of the daily libations offered to the ancestors, and they fully participate in the rituals dedicated to the mountain goddess Gamu, the patron deity of the Mosuo people. In other words, among most Sino-Tibetan people, women are important players in maintaining the vital harmony between the forces of nature and humanity. Consequently, they play significant roles in the rituals dedicated to the fertility, health, and prosperity of their families and their communities. Among the Naxi, even outside of the organised creeds, Naxi women have an inordinately low profile. In the twentieth century Lijiang, when Naxi society arose the interests of Chinese and Western social scientists and government policies had not as yet altered the traditional religious scene, there were only a few women shamans and diviners, called *Sani*. The independent Sani did not belong to the organised religions of Buddhism, Taoism and Dongba, and they had such low social status that the word itself is an insult. There were also male independent shaman-diviners in twentieth-century Lijiang called *Leebu*. The *lee* are the Naxi equivalent of the Tibetan *klu*; the Leebu are associated with Saddo, the spirit of the tutelary deity of Lijian and its people, Yulonghsan (*Jade Dragon Mountain*). In the twentieth century, the Leebu were all men but it is likely that this had not always been the case, for the Naxi word Leebu [*leebv*] means nothing other than 'wife of the *lee*'.[50]

49 Field records, Lijiang 1991. See also Mathieu 2015.
50 See Mathieu 2003, 129-33.

***From matriarchy to matriculture?***

Retracing the origins of matricultures in the Sino-Tibetan Marches to the matriarchal Nüguo of the Sui and Tang dynasties, as Darragon does, and indeed, as I also proposed some years ago,[51] it is evident that, as Darragon notes, the matriarchy encountered in the Chinese histories is not compatible with Takamure Itsui's or Heide Göttner-Abendroth's visions of peaceful egalitarian matricentric societies.[52] Just as evidently, Chinese histories report on the customs of the Nüguo from the perspective of the Chinese interior, with the purpose of informing the Chinese emperor. From a patriarchal perspective, it would be easy to construe a gender system in which women had authority among both women and men as a system in which women had authority over men. However, it is worth remembering that ideas about gender roles and the relative position of women and men in Tang dynasty China were not as extremely patriarchal as they became in the following dynasties. As it stands, the historical record explored by Darragon tells us that the Nüguo were frequently at war and that they were neither egalitarian nor gender egalitarian.[53]

Historically, not only the Nüguo but also the greater Sino-Tibetan frontier was frequently at war, and the Nüguo queendom would not have survived if its queens had not been able to exert military power and the crafts of diplomacy. Darragon writes that, post-742 CE, the queens of Nüguo were replaced by kings. In 796 and 797 CE, King Tang Lixi came to the Chinese court in the company of minor monarchs whose small kingdoms had been annexed by the Tibetan Empire. After this, no more is said about the Nüguo in Chinese official records. Still, the Nüguo may not have disappeared altogether, because the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family* of Lijiang and the *Ming History* give reasons to believe that Nüguo clans conquered Lijiang during the tenth century and that they did so under Tibetan Bon auspices.[54]

The following picture emerges: Mou chieftains of the Mo-so kingdom of Lijiang were descended from the Ngue, a clan connected to the Nüguo; they were Bonpos, and they practiced matrilineal succession. After the Mongol conquest of Lijiang, the Ah chiefs shifted Mou rule to patrilineality, and under the Ming emperors, the Mu made further amendments to their successions to satisfy Confucian expectations: They reclaimed their ancient name *Mou* as *Mu* and carried it in Chinese fashion. The Mu kept a record of their legal successions, which is to say, their patriline, which Mu Gong duly officialised in the genealogical chronicles he composed in 1516. Almost thirty years later, however, Mu Gong became aware of just how un-Confucian his ancestral claims could appear.

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51 Mathieu 1997.

52 See Sato's article, this issue, and Heide Göttner-Abendroth, *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Cultures Across the Globe*, trans. Karen Smith (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012/2013).

53 See William W. Rockhill, *In the Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey Through China, Mongolia, and Tibet* (New York: Century Company, 1891), 337-40, for a translation of the relevant passage of the *Sui Shu* (Bk. 83); also noted in Darragon (this issue).

54 In the ninth and tenth centuries, the kingdom of Tibet was embroiled in religious conflicts between Bonpos and Buddhists. The Tibetan historical record relates that a Bon mission was sent from the Tibetan interior to the country of Jang (Qiang) in the ninth century. Guo Dalie, 'Lun Naxizu Dongba Jiao Yu Zangzu Ben Jiao Guanxi', [On the Naxi Dongba and its relation to the Tibetan Bon], Internal publication, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, 1993; Helmut Hoffman, *The Religions of Tibet* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), 96; Joseph F. Rock, 'The Zhima Funeral Ceremony of the Na-khi of Southwestern China', *Studia Instituti Anthropos*, IX (1955), 4; Mathieu 2015.

In 1545, under the guidance of his friend, the famous Confucian scholar Yang Shen, Mu Gong revised his genealogy and produced a *second* chronicle. This second chronicle contained a new genealogy which had the curious disadvantage of being several centuries shorter than the genealogy compiled in 1516, while having the obvious advantage of listing all of Mu Gong's patrilineal ancestors and only those.[55] In this second chronicle, Mu Gong removed all traces of his Nanzhao and Mou ancestors, and gave his first historic ancestor as Nian-Bao Ah-Cong who was named as Mou-Bao Ah-Cong in the first chronicle (the first ancestor from the time of the Mongol conquest). But this second chronicle contained other important changes.

Conscious of remaining historically correct, Mu Gong's friend and mentor, Yang Shen, added a preface to this chronicle in which *he* listed the Mu's ancestors of the Nanzhao and Song periods. In Yang Shen's list, however, all the names prior to the appearance of the patronym Mu were expunged of the first and third syllables, and thus purged of all the clan names of mothers and wives. La-Gu Pu-Meng was now given as Gu-Meng, Pu-Meng Pu-Wang as Meng-Wang, Mou-Ju Mou-Xi is Ju-Xi, and so forth. And whereas Mu Gong renamed Mou-Ba Ah-Cong Nian-Bao Ah-Cong, Yang Shen renamed him Mai Cong.[56] In fact, Yang Shen and Mu Gong seem to have been especially eager to delete the Mou dynasty from the Mu family's genealogy, and with this all trace of matrilateral and matrilineal successions. In all appearance, they succeeded so completely that in the twentieth century, the ethnonym Mo-so, which heralded the matrilineal Mou successions, was thoroughly despised in Lijiang and none of the Mu descendants could explain the discrepancies between Mu Gong's two chronicles. But then again, one should not conclude from this that the feudal period put an end to mother-right among the Naxi's ancestors. In fact, the historical record shows that if fell not to the Mu feudal lords but to the Qing administrators to deliver the final blow to matrilineality in Lijiang.

Matriarchal-matrilineal tribes remained in Yezhi (a territory of the Lijiang prefecture) a decade after the 1723 abolition of the Lijiang feudal domain, and almost two centuries after Mu Gong and Yang Shen produced the second (Confucianised) genealogy. Written in 1918, the genealogical records of the Yezhi chiefs relate that in 1737 and 1738, the chieftain He Niang and her lieutenant Zhi Min (also her daughter-in-law), formally requested from the Emperor that their "tribal system be replaced by a Chinese system". After this, their descendants carried the patronym Wang in Chinese fashion. The transition to Chinese patrilineality, however, appears to have not gone entirely smoothly, for the same records confirm that later chief Wang Ah-Zhi inherited her position ‘like her mother’ and mentions no associated. The Yehzi genealogy also shows that, over time, Wangs succeeded each other from brother to brother as well as from father to son, that they adopted sons-in-law, and sent some of their own sons to marry uxorilocally.[57]

And so, in the end, the cumulative effect of feudal and Imperial reforms effectively ended matrilineality among the Naxi. And yet, through the centuries of gender marginalisation and oppression, something of the ancient matriarchal spirit survived. While Naxi women were excluded from ritual, they remained central to the economic life of their households and their community. In the 1990s, the late Naxi scholar He Zhiwu and others confirmed that in pre-

55 Mathieu, 2003, 2011, and 2015.
56 Rock 1947 and Mathieu 2003, 49.
57 Rock 1947, 308-13

Revolutionary society, the domestic and ritual status of Naxi women in no way reflected their dominant economic role or the strength and independence of their temperament. Indeed, in pre-Revolution Lijiang, women ran household finances along with the markets, butcher shops and wine shops. For Joseph Rock and Peter Goullart, long-term residents of northern Yunnan before the Communist revolution, Naxi women were at once chattel and Amazons. But it came as no surprise to either Rock or Goullart that Naxi women should have rallied enthusiastically to the Communist promise of gender equality and spearheaded the revolution in Lijiang.[58]

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, between the 1950s and the late 1970s, government policies implemented sweeping social and economic reforms in southwestern China. In Lijiang, arranged marriage was abolished and replaced by free-choice marriage, and the Naxi love suicide custom disappeared with these reforms. The Mosuo and other marriage-less people of the Sino-Tibetan marches were, for their part, pressured to abandon their customs of free-love and to adopt monogamous marriage. As everywhere else in China at this time, domestic households were dismantled and brought into the system of collectivisation. But when these policies were rolled back during the 1980s, many people in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands returned to their former way of life and their marriage-less families.

Recent statistics provided by Mattison *et al* in this issue show that in Yongning, neolocal households now account for 27.8% of all households, and patrilocal households for 22.9%. It is interesting to compare these statistics with those collected in Yongning by Chinese social scientists between 1958 and 1962, which is to say shortly after the abolition of the feudal system in 1956. In some parts of Yongning about half the households surveyed were said to reckon descent in a mixed matrilineal-patrilineal manner and around 6% patrilineally.[59] These mixed genealogies were at the time described as 'patriarchal-matriarchal' and understood as evidence of the inevitable evolution of Mosuo society towards patrilineality and patriarchy, along the lines of Engels and Marx's socio-evolutionist theory and according to the laws of historical materialism.

In the 1990s, however, Chinese colleagues in Kunming were no longer convinced of this particular aspect of historical materialism. In conversation, they reflected that despite several decades of government campaigns, widespread education in the common language (Chinese Putonghua), national studies, and a common moral education, the Mosuo were attached to their marriage-less families because they perceived definitive advantages in this way of life. Note that these reflections were made before mass tourism transformed the economy of the Yongning basin. Three decades later, evidently, the opportunities and demands of the tourist industry, information technology, the market economy, mass culture, and environmental degradation are posing new challenges to the continuities of traditional lives.

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58 Goullart; Sydney D. White, *Medical Discourses, Naxi Identities, and the State: transformations in Socialist China*, PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley, United States, 1993, Chapter 8, ‘Fame and Sacrifice.’

59 See *Ninglang Yizu Zizhixian Yongning Naxizu Shehui Ji Muxizhi Diaocha* [Research into the social and matrilineal system of the Naxi nationality of Yongning, Ninglang Yi Autonomous County], Vol. 2 (Kunming, Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1988), 42-3 and 291-4; Yan Ruxian and Song Zhaolin, *Yongning Naxizu de Muxi Zhi* [The Matrilineal System of the Naxi Nationality in Yongning] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1983); *Yongning Naxizu de Muxi Zhi* [The matrilineal system of the Naxi nationality in Yongning] (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1983).

Takamure Itsui believed that aspects of the old Japanese matricultural world had endured in Shinto magico-religious rituals, and that a thousand years of Imperial patriarchal policies had not entirely destroyed fundamental aspects of the ancient society (Sato, this issue). The matricultures of the Sino-Tibetan marches were put to the test of centuries of political, religious and economic development. Seen in context of a two-millennia-long history, the contributions in this collection would lead one to believe, as Takamure hoped, that matriculture is resilient and that it has a future.

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# Review:
# Ok-Kyung Pak: *Les Plongeuses Jamnyo (Haenyo) de Jeju en Corée et le Néo-Confucianisme, une mythologie double*, Éditions Ides et Calended, 2018, Fondation Culturelle Musée Barbier-Mueller.

**Marie-Françoise Guédon, PhD**

Ok-Kyung Pak is well known for her work with the Minangkabau, a matrilineal society in Sumatra. This new study is of particular interest to anyone working with matricultural systems and the anthropology of women, but suitable for the general public. It is a beautifully illustrated monograph, enriched by the author's own images and those of her collaborator, local artist Koh Sing Mi. The book brings a short but exciting report of women's lives in the fishing villages of Jeju. Jeju, a small South Korean Island, has gained fame among both tourists and researchers on account of its female fishing traditions – whereby women are sustaining the economy with fishing by breath-hold diving (free diving). Women's economic self-sufficiency and their obvious responsibility for most of the governance in their community challenge the norms of the local Confucian patriarchal kinship system that grants men high status, and entrusts them with official political functions and the ritual care of ancestors. Ok-Kyung Pak's contribution resides in her attention to all aspects of the Jeju kinship system and how those concretely affect individual women's lives. *Les plongeuses Jamnyo* is a descriptive work, centered on a fishing village on Udo, one of the small islands around Jeju; it is not a theoretical discussion. Nevertheless, Ok-Kyung Pak has produced an informed ethnography that pays attention to operative concepts, and demonstrates a sound awareness of the complex problematics of kinship studies (with references to *Living Kinship in the Pacficic* (2015) by C. Toren and S. Pauwels (eds.), and to *What Kinship Is … And is Not*, by M. Sahlins (2013).

Known as *jamnyo* [divers], a term of self-reference, or *haenyo* [sea women], a derogatory term first introduced by the colonial Japanese authorities then propagated by Korean administrators and outside researchers, the fishing women live in the coastal villages and the smaller islands surrounding Jeju. Their numbers are steadily declining but they have left an indelible mark on the history of the island. Unlike the Japanese *ama*, women divers and abalone fishers who enjoyed the respect of their neighbors and even of the emperor, the *jamnyo* have survived centuries of contempt, hardship, exploitation, catastrophes, and wars. Through it all, they managed to keep their families fed as well as

to pay tributes due to the ruling powers of the days through their harvests of shellfish (abalone), seaweed, and other sea-products.

Jeju island is an unfertile volcanic land, about 1840 square kilometers, located in the Korean straits. It has a difficult climate with uncertain and hostile weather. The land is extremely dry, stony and infertile except for small carefully tended farming plots protected by stone walls. Besides fishing, the local people have long been dependent on horticulture and herding, including horses introduced by the Mongolian armies, on the rare pastures supplemented with citrus orchards. In a more distant past, during the Koryo era and even while the Mongols controlled the land (1231-1259), men were fishers, sailors, merchants, ship builders and high sea travelers, and they spent a great part of their time on the ocean together with their families. However, they were forced to abandon these trades, generation after generation, during the Chosan era as invading armies and administrators limited their freedom. And generation after generation, women had to find means to feed their families. It would be easy to attribute the quasi-matriarchal state of Jeju island to these historical circumstances. The main contribution of this book is its refusal to accept this simplistic explanation and thus allow us to glimpse the early and active involvement of the jamnyo communities in the economic, ritual and political life of the island.

According to the author, the island of Jeju is well known in Korea, and has been studied for several decades by Korean historians and anthropologists, though usually from a continental and male perspective. Except in recent years when islanders themselves have become involved in research concerning their homeland, and with the publication of one study authored by a feminist anthropologist, Cho Hae-Jeong, (1979, 1992, 2016) Korean research on Jeju has focused on the male side of society and the failure of the continental project to convert the islanders to the Confucian social model; continental scholars usually explain this failure by invoking the poverty of the land, and in particular the absence of land suitable for rice cultivation (an explanation that takes for granted the cultural superiority of the continent) . Women, especially fishing women, have long been denigrated for their inability or unwillingness to submit to the civilizing influence of the Confucian codes of conduct governing sex and age, including the rigid female dress codes (hardly suitable for free diving), female confinement to domestic management, and the submission of women to male authority.

Ok-Kyung Pak's study is divided into five chapters, and ends with a short conclusion.

The first chapter sets the historical stage on which Jeju population and culture evolved through an extremely violent past. It is worth relating some of the details.

The history of the island, and the many small dependant islets around its shores, was set in motion by the geographical location of the Jeju archipelago, located in the ocean, 200 kilometers from the Korean peninsula, at the maritime confluence of the Chinese empire, the Japanese empire and the Korean kingdoms, all militarized states. Originally a small but fiercely independent maritime kingdom, known as Samna, Jeju suffered though centuries of invasion, exploitation, forced labor and pillage. The island was successively invaded by the early Korean kingdoms. In 938, it was subjugated by the rulers

of the Korio Dynasty (918-1392) who officially annexed it in 1105, installed their own governors and renamed the island Jeju. The Mongols (1260-1368), once in control of Korea, seized Jeju (1273) and introduced large scale horse herding for their cavalry, as well as Buddhist temples and slavery. Back in power, the unified Korean kingdom of Koryo transformed the island into a military fortress and reduced the inhabitants to total poverty through the levy of high taxes and tributes, forced labor, and the enlisting of able-bodied men and women to serve in the Korean army. Male mortality rate (already very high), skyrocketed.

Toward the end of the Koryo era, Chinese ideology and Confucianism became influential, and the Korean government embarked on a vast program of social transformation toward a hierarchical and rational all-encompassing patriarchy. In 1392, the Koryo dynasty was replaced by the Choson (Choseon or Joseon) dynasty (1392-1910). The Choson autocratic rulers turned Jeju into their main military stronghold and a jail for exiled nobles and scholars who had become politically undesirable, and they imposed a rigid Confucian social and religious ideology on its inhabitants. Unable to administer a population who lived from and on the sea (they were called “sea nomads”), the Choson authorities forbade contacts with the continent and forced the inhabitants to abandon their maritime industries, whether trade or sea fishing. By then, women had already replaced men as primary economic contributors with fishing from the beaches and farming. In 1692, the Choson government decreed that no one would be permitted to leave the island, and Jeju people became 'foreigners'. The quarantine was to last almost two centuries, leaving the already desolate island with no adequate means of subsistence. But the women went on fishing and farming and their families survived.

In 1702, a ‘purification’ campaign led to the destruction of 129 traditional shamanic sanctuaries (more than half of the local shrines) and the two Buddhist temples. The events of this campaign are still alive in the collective memory. The islanders rebuilt their sanctuaries. But the high taxes and tribute led to several revolts, all severely repressed (including later protests in 1813, 1862, 1893, 1901).

In 1910, the Japanese invasion and colonization of Korea ended the administrative tutelage of Jeju by the Choson kingdom, and replaced it with a modernized system of labor exploitation and a capitalist mode of production. Men and women of Jejeu were then enlisted as laborers or deported to Japan as low cost workers or miners. Imposed migration and the search for paying jobs decimated the population. The remaining inhabitants in the coastal villages were put to work forcing women to collect, between other thing, seafood and enormous quantities of seaweeds from which the Japanese extracted the iodine needed for the production of canon powder. More revolts ensued, sometimes led by women. In 1917, a revolt saw the participation of 130 *jamnyo* women. Meanwhile, women quickly learned the intricacies of overseas market forces and geopolitics. The *jamnyo* women, well organized through their traditional social systems, also got acquainted with Marxist ideology.

At the end of the Second World War, popular protest arose in Jeju, while a new international conflict engulfed Korea and opposed the international powers that supported capitalist state and economy on one side, and the pro-Russian and pro-Communists supporters on the other. The threatening division of Korea had immediate repercussions on Jeju. On the 3rd of April 1948, the Jeju population already

unhappy with the imposition of new restrictions, began a new protest. This action spurred Korea and the continental powers to intervene. With the acquiescence of the Americans, they launched a repression that lasted until the unofficial end of the Korean war in 1953. The repression resulted in large scale massacres that left 30 000 dead (a tenth of the population) and 160 burnt down villages (70% of the villages). Then Jeju was left to its ashes and memories, and forgotten by the continent. The women went on with their diving and their working the fields.

It is only in the 1960s that the local economy began to show some vitality, with the development of an export market, especially to Japan after 1970, for seaweeds, seafood (haliotis) and mandarine fruit,. The 1980s saw the arrival of Chinese tourists (and Chinese tourism entrepreneurs) who came in larger and larger waves, by plane and cruise ships, until the island had to cope with several millions of visitors a year; then international political tensions intervene a few years ago and tourism sharply declined. Women went on fishing, working and saving money. Meanwhile, urbanization and the globalization of the economy and communication systems, and the spreading influence of international tourism took their toil on the rural society. While in 1950, there were over 30 000 *Jamnyo* working and earning enough money to rebuild their homes and to send their daughters to school and university, in 1993, there were only about 5650 active *jamnyo*, 85% of whom were over fifty years old. By comparison, it is estimated that in the 1960s more than 20% of the island women were involved in freediving fishing.

Throughout all the exactions and invasions, and the ensuing waves of poverty, the people of Jeju survived, reconstructing the shrines, transmitting ritual texts, archiving their history, and preserving certain traits differentiating them from the continent. In particular, Ok-Kyung Pak shows the incapacity of continental authorities to impose notions of aristocracy, and especially of landed gentry, and a social hierarchy with social classes, Today, agriculture in Jeju is still pursued on small privately owned parcels of land distributed throughout the population. They are no sharecroppers and no powerful landowners. The patrilineal system imposed on the population was never firmly established, even less on the women, and it is slowly and steadily weakening,

The second chapter offers an analysis of the kinship systems on Jeju, and more particularly the system the inhabitants call *kwendang*. Kwendang is a localized social group and the term may refer to a matrilocal and endogamous extended family as well as to the localized village (or “family village”) where its lives as a distinct community. It is managed by married women and built around women's activities. Each *kwendang* is composed of several related nuclear families, or households, headed by a married woman, working and organizing the work to produce the food, goods and services needed by her family. Both fishing and agriculture are considered women’s work. The *kwendang* controls the exploitation of maritime resources and access to diving sites, and manages (and trains) the human resources held in common – the *jimnyo* of the *kwendang* dive together as a team, and the women of the *kwendang* work together in the field. In addition, the *kwendang* functions as a pool of potential marriage partners. It favors endogamy at the village level as well as at the kin group level, and, in the past, promoted sororal polygamy. Finally, *kwendangs* maintain the shamanic shrines or sanctuaries at

the center of religious life, and the relations with the powers of nature, including the goddesses ruling the ocean.

The *kwendang* system is centered and controlled by women but its descent system is not matrilineal. The *kwendang* coexists with elements of a patrilineal kinship system with exogamous clans supported by the "ideal cultural" model of Neo-Confucian rules. This system, the influence of which is relatively weak, allows the men to present themselves as being in charge of the public official scene, and to assume the full responsibility of ancestral rituals that ensure the continuity of the patriclans, primogeniture and birth rank. The oldest son resides near his parents' house.

The conjunction of the *kwendang* and the Confucian patrilineal system results in a social organization largely divergent from the traditional Korean model: It allows an egalitarian society that diffuses rank, both gender-wise and generation-wise. The system also undermines primogeniture, refuses to give primacy to one of the genders, and results in what Cho calls "no dominant gender" relations. It supports women managing their own affairs as well as the organization of the daily life of their family and community, the management of the diving teams and the horticultural tasks, and the relationships with the other *kwendang*. It also encourages and respects the strong individualism which is valued throughout the island and is in sharp contrast with the Korean emphasis on obedience to a common norm. At a different level, and in a most interesting way, as noted by Ok-Kyung Pak, this system encourages lateral kinship ties rather than the vertical ties of Confucian lineages and clans.

It would not do justice to Ok-Kyung Pak's analysis to conclude that the *kwendang* manages the social world of women while the patrilineal clans define the society of men. The author does not support the idea of a social world divided according to genders, for instance with men belonging to patriclans, and women forming matrilineages. She maintains that this form of bilineality is unthinkable on Jeju. It is not Jeju society but rather Jeju worldview and Jeju mythology that are gendered and bilineal. Men belong to the clans and maintain them in Confucian style, keeping the (patrilineal) genealogical charts and caring for the ancestral tombs; but at the same time, they belong to the village and to the local community of relatives managed by their wives and they participate in the economic and ritual activities of their mothers' or wives' *kwendang*. This participation was probably more intense in the past since we read stories of male shamans and male divers in historical texts. Meanwhile women manage their *kwendang*, its organization and its activities; they document its history and its genealogies, and defend its resources; but women also serve the patrilineal clans of their husbands where they play their role as subservient members, mothers, and guarantors of the superiority of man over woman, and of husband over wife.

The third chapter describes the activities, the collectivity and the economic contribution of the female divers to Jeju society. The fisherwomen work in teams, which are composed of women from the same village and therefore kinswomen. The work is dangerous and demands physical stamina, experience, competence and years of training, as well as discipline and cooperation between the divers. Rituals underline the ancient and always renewed kinship ties between the human inhabitants of the land and the powers of the sea, led by a giant goddess and creatrix of the island who rules the sea and gave

her life to create an all essential bridge with the continent. Indeed, in the Jeju worldview, islands cannot survive by themselves. Men, although they were formerly fishermen, divers, sailors and shipbuilders and travelled with their ships as far as Singapour,  India and Northern Japan, have long lost access to the sea, partly for historical reasons; for instance, during the Choson era, they did not have the right to work on water, and an early Choson government decree explicitely forbade them to dive and work together with their wives as they used to do before the Confucian era… Other considerations could stem from the close connection between the sea and its female divine expressions, and the intimate contacts women maintain with them through prayers, offerings and actual physical care of the beaches and ocean floor, as well as the trust developed through generations of women, working together, training and depending on each other.

The fourth chapter describes the shamanic rituals, maintained and controlled by women, keeping open the connection between human beings and the world of spirits, goddesses and dead ancestors or relatives (who remain part of the community after their death), and most importantly the mostly female powers of nature, land and sea.

Shamanic rituals take place in sanctuaries dedicated to ancestral divinities or goddesses and located near their respective villages. The rituals usually last from morning to evening. Organized by the women and often by and for the divers, shamanic rituals are community affairs, they are non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical and welcome both men and women. By contrast, on the male side, male priests conduct the *pojae*: the formal Confucian night rituals addressing ancestors in the paternal line and re-affirming male ranks, without any women in attendance .

Unlike the male rituals, the various functions of local sanctuaries deal primarily with the natural world, the ocean, the wind and the volcanoes, and the world of related spirits. Rituals aim to strengthen the connections between the villages and the eighteen thousand local divinities, eighty percent of which are goddesses; to serve the individual needs of people, including healing; to secure a good harvest; or to ensure the divine protection and good will of the ocean goddesses and spirits toward the divers. Rituals also celebrate dead relatives, since they are thought to remain part of the family and to care about its well-being. Moreover, at a different level, it is through the sanctuaries that local archives are kept, and that historical events, as well as oral literature, songs and myths are remembered. The myths relate mostly the origins and early human lives of the divinities (who lived as humans before they acquire their divine status). Chief among them are the great powers of the sea. The shamanic myths, whether the grand narrative concerning the establishment of the island as a whole, or the local stories, transmit the words and the actions of the divinities as well as their reactions to historical events, and can therefore been considered both a kind of legal code, and a compilation of historical events. Shamanic myths and rituals open on a world built on the cooperation between the powers of nature, which are partially human and the human beings who are their descendants or inhabit their land. These powers favor female descent, and hint at a greater presence of female powers in the distant past, and times before the arrival of Confucianism on the island

The female communities of divers have maintained the matrilineal tradition in their own lives: For instance, they refuse patronyms, use forms of address that do not mention male kins, and call each other by such terms as: “mother of so and so”, “sister of so and so”, “sister in law of so and so”… The great powers of the ocean, and first of all the giant sea Goddess, who directly affect the female divers and the water conditions, currents and weather on the coast, are given offerings and prayers, so they will endorse the activities of the women, who, meanwhile take concrete care of the non-human beings, plants, fish and animals, and the whole ecology of the water environment, even re-seeding the weeds. The rituals renew the direct matrilineal connection between the divine beings and their human descendants.

Chapter five surveys the influence of neo-Confucianism, imported from China to Korea and to Jeju Island. Presented as an “ideal culture” that should naturally appeal to anyone, it gives men the status associated with the noble patronyms inherited from the (sometime mythical) continental aristocracy. A myth of origin dating back to the early days of Confucian influence relates the arrival (or emergence) of the three “founding brothers” and earliest patrilineal ancestors who became the first rulers of the Tamna Kingdom; tellingly, it describes the brothers finding the magical box that contained the things needed to start a civilized society: three women, a calf and a horse, and five kinds of grain seeds. Such a myth, unrelated to anything having to do with nature or with the ocean, or even with the island volcanoes, is built exclusively on the human and male side of the world, and sustains a patriarchal system of exogamous clans. This system where women have no public functions and are permitted no initiative and no ways to participate in anything but domestic tasks, had no chance to succeed in Jeju Island where women’s work had long been essential to universal survival, the more so as men were systematically targeted, weakened and decimated by the occupying colonizing powers.

Korean scholars have interpreted the cultural situation of Jeju island as a culture of compromise – a “lesser” or corrupted culture, in which people attempt to do the best they can in poor circumstances while failing in their civilizing effort; alternatively, Jeju was also presented as a « double culture » with each side antagonizing the other. Ok-Kyung Pak contends on the contrary that Jeju constructed a culture of its own on the basis of the co-existence of elements coming from the continent integrating the hierarchical Confucian system, and the non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian Indigenous culture supporting among other things the independence and self-sufficiency of women, a culture which the Confucian-trained scholars could probably not even recognize as such. Ok-Kyung Pak concludes that “the relations between the dominant national system (Confucianism in this case] and the ancient local civil society are not necessarily antagonistic, even if the old society was constrained by precariousness, marginalization and colonization” (p. 30, my translation).

Continental Korean society was not always patrilineal [as may be inferred from the Korean. shamanic Mudang women]. In the distant past, before the first or second century A,D, it was most probably bilateral and uxorilocal, with kin groups acknowledging relatives on both maternal and paternal sides and including in-laws, and with little interest or investment in social class. By contrast, Chinese-Confucian clans are purely patrilineal and exogamous, and exclude all non-consanguineal kins would-be relatives. According to Ok-Kyung Pak, Jeju may be an example of the survival of a kinship system

similar to that of the ancient pre-Confucian Korea. On Jeju, rather than being replaced by Confucianism, it combined an ideology of masculine superiority, imposed by Confucianism, with a more ancient worldview . Ok-Kyung Pak's readers are led to conclude that if everything that has value on Jeju (land, prestige, knowledge) is shared between the genders and leads to a balanced relationship between men and women, this relationship is not a product of compromise, but is due to the continuity and endurance of ancient values.

In conclusion, Ok-Kyung Pak develops a synthesis of the changes affecting contemporary Jeju society under the forces of accelerated industrialization and the disappearance of traditional ways of life; at the same time, this society is developing new perceptions of its cultural identity ("a society centered on women") intertwined with a renewal of the old kinship ties with nature in general and the ocean goddess Seolmundae Halmang in particular. For instance, since 2007, a local organization presents a new two-week festival presided by nine priestesses celebrating the giant Goddess in order to bring both the inhabitants of the island and the tourists, to renew their commitment to the values demonstrated by the *jamnyo* in their symbiotic relationship with nature.

Ok-Kyung Pak's book, *Les Plongeuses Jamnyo (Haenyo) de Jeju en Corée et le Néo-Confucianisme, une mythologie double* is intended to serve the *jamnyo* communities, and to express the respect due to the women themselves. And it reaches that goal. But for researchers and students, this book provides something else: invaluable data allowing us to better understand societies we label matrilineal or matriarchal, and their matricultural orientations.

Several themes, among the many that are mentioned, would merit a longer exploration.
The juxtaposition of women-centered Kwendang (or family-villages) and patrilineal clan system results in a system for which the current technical definitions available to ethnologists are inadequate. Among other issues, the social and economic processes taking place in the *kwendang* do not fit in the classificatory listing of the usual types of descent systems, such as matrilineal, patrilineal, bilineal, and ambilineal, in addition to the bilateral kin groups.

One question in vogue today in Korea is the complex issue of shamanism and its role in Jeju culture. In Korean cities, since the Choson era, the imperial law forbade shamanic practices to all citizen, but the practices were kept alive by the poorer women of the lowest social classes, who were overlooked by the authorities that deemed them unworthy of notice. It may be that the women in Jeju benefited from their low status to keep their world alive. In any case, it seems to me remarkable that while the men, in their official duties, were restricted to a quasi a-historical vision centered on the past and the deeds of their ancestors (also associated with their continental origin), the women lived in a wider and richer time frame: The sanctuaries dedicated to shamanic practices, today almost completely managed by women, have long been considered by the continental rulers as the supports of the local civil society and one of the sources of its indiscipline and its refusal to be properly enrolled into Korean society – which is why in the 18$^{th}$ century the sanctuaries were ordered burnt throughout the island. This large-scale destruction did not have the expected consequences. The sanctuaries are still in function today. It is clear that they were not the only support of ritual life, but simply one of its

expressions; the sanctuaries were much more than buildings, and the ramifications of the ritual life extended into all aspects of daily life. More than the sanctuaries themselves, it is obvious that it is the entire intangible socio-cultural heritage –the sanctuaries, the world view, the communal links with land and sea, the relations between genders, as well as an entire corpus of oral and musical literature– that constituted the true pillar of Jeju society. And this heritage was maintained and transmitted and recreated by women. Ok-Kyung Pak remarks that the shamanic rituals, songs and texts preserved historical data and extended to more than just the local history. The shamans and their ritual communities were the keepers of the collective memory as well as of history in the European sense of the term. In addition to genealogies, diving sites, fishing rights, the locations and the boundaries of farming land and pasture, this oral archive addressed migrations, famines, forced removal, massacres, and anti-colonial struggles, insurrections and survival stories. Fulfilling the female historical responsibility presupposes an extraordinary historical awareness that may explain why and how the people on Jeju became involved early with anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements. It also reminds us that these women were "educated" in the Jeju sense, rather that the continental sense of the word, and were knowledgeable about the outside world.

For the past fifty years, the sons and daughters of the *jamnyo* have taken in their own hands the writing of the history and cultural heritage of the island in order to rewrite the history provided by and for continental accounts. In so doing, they continue to fulfill the responsibility of their mothers, and may contribute to re-insert men's lives into history.

For some anthropologists, the case of Jeju is simply the result of the emergence of a matrilineal, even matriarchal society through a historical process that weakened the male population and prevented their participation in the economy of the island. Ok-King Pak implicitly but firmly refutes that scheme. Without imposing conclusions, she refers to cultural roots older than historical references, not to explain but to describe the strong matricultural system [my expression] in place. Thus, she cites *jamnyo*'s terms of address, the reference to a female creatrix in the shamanic origin myth, the ubiquitous mentions of goddesses in the natural world and the definition of these goddesses as matrilineal ancestors, and the fact that the ocean is ruled by female forces.

For the researchers working on kinship systems, this ethnography is a welcome contribution. My own perspective is born from a critical look at kinship studies: The North American kinship theoreticians attempted in the middle of the twentieth century to postulate kinship systems following logical principles modulated by ecological and economical factors, while Asian scholars pursued the ideal conceptions of homogeneous patrilineal clans by invoking ethical considerations. Both scholarly traditions presented kinship systems as essentially detached from history and from the actual lives and choices of individuals. By contrast, Ok-Kyung Pak describes pragmatic kinship ties welcoming horizontal links and circumstantial connections where the proximity of neighborhood, the habits of cohabitation and the ties of cooperation are essential factors inscribed in the territory and the life of the village (hence the term "village kin"). The juxtaposition of two kinship systems, *kwendang* and patrilineal clans, does not appear to be a source of conflict. And the adoption of an ideology of male superiority in spite of  (or because of) a matriarchal orientation in the governance of the community is

not that unusual. It is described by Ok-Kyung Pak, for instance, among the matrilineal Minangkabau people in Sumatra. In any case, the *kwendang* system of Jeju is too anchored in the geographical landcape, too woven in the social fabric, and too involved in the mythical universe to be a make-shift affair

My own impression is that while it would have been inconceivable for the Korean Confucian scholars to suspect that the failure of the continental project was due less to the aridity of the soil than to the fortitude of the islanders, we could envision that the solidity of the old culture carried by the women, and the courage they derived from their collective solidarity had something to do with their survival.

Marie-Françoise Guédon

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Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies

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# Correction Notice

## for *Discussion*, page 184, par. 2

Date complaint received: 27 June 2021
Title: Discussion, March 2021
Author: Christine Mathieu
Journal: *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*
Theme: Matricultural Societies of East Asia
Issue: Volume 2, Issue 1 (Mar 2021, pp. 176-201)
Location: page 184, paragraph 2
Description of error: error in discussion
Correction: below
Original: at the end

CORRECTION:
DNA data studies cited by Mattison *et al* lend support the proposition that there was a shift *to* matrilineality in Yongning about a thousand years ago, corresponding to the Mou dynasty, and the foundation of the Mo-so Zhao - as given by Mu Gong in the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family.*

ORIGINAL:
DNA data studies pursued by Mattison *et al* show a shift *to* matrilineality in Yongning about a thousand years ago, for the latter corresponds to the Mou dynasty, and the foundation of the Mo-so Zhao - as given by Mu Gong in the *Genealogical Chronicles of the Mu Family.*

Volume 02, Issue 1 March 2021 pp. 213 - 214

Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies

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# Correction Notice

## for *Indigenous Beliefs for Sustainability: On the Significance of Ritual in the Gender Ecology of Tibetan and Mosuo Matricultures of Northwestern Yunnan*

Date complaints received: 20 June 2022
Title: Indigenous Beliefs for Sustainability: On the Significance of Ritual in the Gender Ecology of Tibetan and Mosuo Matricultures of Northwestern Yunnan
Author: Tommaso Previato
Journal: *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies*
Theme: Matricultural Societies of East Asia
Issue: Volume 2, Issue 1 (Mar 2021, pp. 34 - 65)
Locations: (1) page 47, paragraph 3; (2) page 58, notes 74-98; (3) page 62
Description of error: missing endnote apex no. 74, which disordered notes 74 to 98; missing bibliographical entry
Corrections: below
Originals: not included

CORRECTION:
(1) Page 47, paragraph 3, should read:

> ...the Mosuo can be regarded as one of the last surviving matriarchal societies in the world.[74]

(2) properly ordered endnotes should read:

74. This distinguishes them from their sinicized Naxi cousins of the nearby Lijiang basin (the western Naxi, or Naxi proper), whose élites broke off with matrilateral alliance customs no later than the middle Ming period (ca. 1545) (explored further below). Mathieu, "Love and Marriage", pp. 252-254.
75. Yang et al., *Ninglang Yizu Zizhixian Gaikuang*, p. 10; Yan et al., "Analysis of the Role of the Mosuo Culture", p. 52.
76. Göttner-Abendroth, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Cai, *A Society Without Fathers or Husbands*, pp. 122-125, 171-175; Shih, "Genesis of Marriage", p. 385. Some, however, hold the view that while in some places (Labei) the *dabu* is indeed a female-only institution, in some others (Yongning) it is not necessarily so.

77. Li, *Daba Wenhua*, pp. 89-90; Göttner-Abendroth, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 129 (note 8).
78. *Ndaba* can refer either to the person who supersedes ceremonies and recites magic formulas (transmitted only by spoken word) or to the set of religious beliefs which is embodied by such person. Etymological clarifications in Rock, "Shamanism of the Tibetan-Chinese Borderland", p. 805 (cit. in Mathieu, "The Moso Ddaba Religious Specialists", pp. 209, and 232, note 1).
79. Mathieu, *Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland*, p. 123.
80. The official conversion of the Yongning chiefs to the Gelugpa school of Buddhism (Tib. *dGe lugs pa*) came after terrible conflicts between Bön-po animists and the Gelugpa backed by the Mongols. The Lijiang chiefs, instead, opted for the Karma Kagyü which enjoyed the support of Manchu emperors. Mathieu, "The Story of Bon", pp. 373-375; Cai, *op. cit.*, p. 99.
81. Li, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-99.
82. Wang et al., *Yunnan Sichuan Naxizu*, pp. 175, 217.
83. P.K. He, "Senlin yu Minzu Yiyao", p. 73.
84. Mathieu, "The Moso Ddaba", pp. 223-224.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225; Rock, *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom*, pp. 382-383.
86. Wang et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.
87. Rock, *op. cit.*, pp. 418-419; Li, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-157; Yan et al., *op. cit.*, p. 51.
88. P.K. He, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Z.H. He, "Forest Management", pp. 160-161.
89. Z.H. He, *op. cit.*, pp. 147, 153; Mathieu, *Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland*, pp. 19, 45 (note 58), 235-236.
90. Jackson, "Kinship, Suicide and Pictographs", pp. 59-61, 87-88.
91. Mathieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-166, 240-243 (*passim*), 402-403, 407-409; Id., "Love and Marriage", pp. 252-253, 260-261.
92. Cai, *op. cit.*, pp. 185, 385-395; Shih, *The Moso*, pp. 85, 99 (cit. in Mathieu, *Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland*, pp. 241-243, 399).
93. Knödel, "Yongning Moso Kinship", p. 57.
94. Mathieu, "Love and Marriage", pp. 236-238, 263-264; Yang, *Yulong Qingshang*, pp. 2-7, 12-17. Although the oldest ritual text dealing with the *har-la-llü-k'ö* dates 1851, love-pact suicide in Lijiang may have very ancient roots that go back to the Yongzheng reign or even before the Manchus ruled over China, but given the current state of research it is hard to estimate with certainty when the Naxi started to practice it.
95. Yang et al., *op. cit.*, p. 126; Z.H. He, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.
96. Walsh, "From Nü Guo to Nü'er Guo", pp. 458-459, 478-479.
97. Z.H. He, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155, 164, 167-168, 171.
98. Milan, "Entraide et Réciprocité."

(3) Bibliography should include this entry:

Milan, Pascale-Marie. "Entraide et Réciprocité chez les Na de Chine: Une Lecture de la Socialité na et de la Centralité des Maisons dans l'Organisation Sociale." *Matrix: A Journal for Matricultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2021).